Albert Fenn

From his old & sincere friend

Alfred (the Author's brother)

7th April 1894

GEORGE HERN: a Novel. By Henry Glemham. 3 vols. 31s. 6d.

Spectator.—"Apart from questions of character and plot, the writer's taste and culture show themselves so manifestly that we are glad to be in his company. Nor, indeed, is it without considerable merit as a novel."

The **Scotsman** says:—"The author has known how to conceive and work out an original and interesting plot; many of the personages of his story are creations of no ordinary merit. He possesses very considerable powers of depicting the peculiar phase of English provincial life he has chosen to illustrate; and he has a keen appreciation of humour."

LITERATURE.

George Hern, a novel: by Henry Glemham, London: Samuel Tinsley and Co., 10, Southampton Street, Strand.

The novelist who endeavours to associate the names and doings of imaginary persons with places which can be easily recognised, enters upon a somewhat adventurous task. To be successful, the writer must not only create characters which have an individuality of their own, and are not merely puppets which speak and move when he pulls the strings, but he must also, so to speak, catch and reproduce the characteristics of the locality in which the scene of his story is laid. "Henry Glemham" (presumably a *nom de plume*) has, to our thinking, succeeded in meeting all the requirements of the case. The plot of the narrative is simple but ingenious. In the first chapter, the reader is introduced to Heathhammock, "a pleasant little seaport," very much resembling Southwold, and to Storker (the only son of Mr. Kidd Ashbocking, the banker), who is as clever in conversation as he is lazy in the matter of business. This young gentleman has been on a tour in America, and has returned home to settle down in partnership with his father's cousin, Mr. Oscar Ashbocking, the town clerk of Heathhammock. The latter has a daughter, and the elders of the two families are naturally desirous that the contemplated partnership should be cemented by an alliance between their children. Admiral Howsegoe, father of Mrs. Kidd Ashbocking, a crusty and snarly old sailor of ancient type, supposed to be enormously rich, abets the proposal, although Storker takes but little interest in the arrangement. With matters standing in this position, George Hern, the hero, comes upon the scene. He is the natural son of Geo. Boulder, and was born in the workhouse, but his father, although he had himself led anything but an exemplary life, intends to make a gentleman of his son, who becomes articled clerk at Mr. Oscar Ashbocking's office, and eventually the confidential assistant to that gentleman. The hero, had when a boy, been able to save Clara Ashbocking from being insulted by some foreign sailors, and the long and short of it was that the two fell in love. The basis is thus laid for a series of complications which are very carefully and skilfully worked out. The course of true love did not, as usual, run smoothly. The breaking of the bank, an incident appropriately introduced and amusingly described in some of its particulars, must be passed over. It is upon the conduct of Boulder that the real interest of the story turns, and to him we are indebted for what may be called the dramatic situations in the novel, but it would be unfair to state the *denouement* or the circumstances by which it was attended. Suffice it to say that the book will not only repay perusal for that purpose, but that even well-read readers will not fail to admire the author's erudition and the clever and life-like sketch he has given of manners and customs in an out-of-the-way, but most interesting part of the county.

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GEORGE HERN.

A Novel.

BY

HENRY GLEMHAM.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. I.

London:
SAMUEL TINSLEY & CO.,
10, SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND.
1878.
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GEORGE HERN.

CORRIGENDA.

Vol. I. p. 62, line 12, *for* "her" *read* "his."
Vol. I. p. 74, line 20, *for* "autobiography" *read* "anecdotes."
Vol. I. p. 208, line 15, *for* "fire" *read* "fireplace."
Vol. II. p. 33, line 1, and p. 71, line 20, *for* "Molock" *read* "Moloch."
Vol. III. p. 90, line 14, *for* "skunks" *read* "skinks."

the banks of that pleasant little Suffolk sea-port, crossing the breezy bridge over Samphire Creek, an effluent of the Ant, the harbour river.

Passing briskly the one-storied cottage that was once the toll-house, and still took an official air from the board of "Caution to Vagrants" nailed upon it, the new red gas-

GEORGE HERN.

CHAPTER I.

One afternoon in early May, a few years ago, a post-carriage, under the guidance of Ostler Hicklewade, of the Hanging Sword hotel, Heathhammock, might have been seen on the skirts of that pleasant little Suffolk seaport, crossing the breezy bridge over Samphire Creek, an effluent of the Ant, the harbour river.

Passing briskly the one-storied cottage that was once the toll-house, and still took an official air from the board of "Caution to Vagrants" nailed upon it, the new red gas-

works, the antique, ivied Lug-sail Inn (fit back-ground for a group of Morland's rustics), the roadway branching southward to the great flat common, and the white mill, with sunny window out-glowing any golden grain within, it entered Cliff Street, the broad and level main-street of the town.

Winding round the south side of the market-place, past the Hanging Sword, whereat the horses, with back-turned ears, seemed on the alert for instructions to stop, the carriage clattered down South Cliff Street to Battery Green.

In a few moments it had grated along the drive of Castle House, and drew up at the front-door, with a graceful slope of lawn and myrtle-bed between it and the ancient guns that fringed the public path upon the cliff-edge.

A stout, glossy-haired, smiling butler ushered from the carriage a young man of

about twenty-five years of age, who carried a red-lined rug of guanaco-skin, and was followed by a white bull-terrier.

"Ha! quaint, patchwork, but not unimposing pile of my fathers!" he exclaimed, glancing with a smile of good-humoured satisfaction at the house before him, with its battlements and stone facings, its peristyle colonnade, and two small multangular towers. "As somebody said in the play, 'I am with you once again.'"

His gun-case and other luggage having been stacked in the hall, and Hicklewade (in Heathhammock fashion) regaled with gin and beer, that ostler drove away cursing in his soul the smiling butler for half-filling his mug with froth, but agreeably conscious of his own connection with an arrival of interest. For though seaside visitors would, in fine weather, begin to come to the town about this time, he had set down no mere

visitor at Castle House, but Mr. Storker Ashbocking, the son of Mr. Kidd Ashbocking, the Heathhammock banker; and was it not matter of town-talk that this Storker, after his American tour (a refreshment necessitated by legal examinations), was to settle down in partnership with his father's cousin, Mr. Oscar Norman Ashbocking, the Town-clerk of Heathhammock, and the owner of a business spreading far into the county?

Storker again smiled with pleasure as he recognised familiar objects in the hall: the great alabaster vases on each side of the door, the table of mahogany, mounted with black marble and ormolu, on which stood the chalice of pearl he had sometimes worn as a helmet, the kerosene lamps and the candlesticks of Japanese porcelain.

"I've had a jolly time, but I'm glad to see the old place again, Bilge," he said, as the butler took his hat, rug, and dust-coat.

"Not more glad than all here to see you, Mr. Storker, sir, and that's the truth," said Bilge, shifting a little farther from the bull-terrier, who seemed to take suspicious note of the transfer of his master's property.

"Come here, my dear Storker!" cried the comfortable voice of Mrs. Kidd Ashbocking from the drawing-room, the door of which stood partly open. "I mustn't risk the draughts of the hall. Come here."

So Storker went to his mother, who was reclining on a couch of rosewood and Utrecht velvet, with a green shawl of Japanese silk wrapped round her. She rose to a sitting posture as he entered.

"I'm prodigiously glad to see you, mother," he said, releasing himself rather abruptly from her embraces. "Let me introduce my dog Moloch, from Canada. He is as quiet as a sick Quaker, and won't hurt Ariel. How is Ariel? And how are my father and grandfather?"

"All well. You are altered—yet the same," said Mrs. Kidd Ashbocking. "Draw that curtain a little farther, that I may see you better."

Storker shifted the purple satin-damask curtain, well in keeping with the handsome furniture all around, and stood revealed more plainly.

He was a stalwart, boisterous fellow, with a solid square face, whereon the rich tints of sound health had been in a measure quelled by late hours, cigars, pungent drinks, and multiplicity of rich meats. His nose was small and his mouth large, but both were well-formed; and his merry grey eyes were sagacious and pleasant to look upon. There were signs of some effort at grace in his upright bearing, in his well-cut clothes, and the scent of white-rose-essence pervading them, in the swing of his arm, and in the lifting of his hand to finger his large chin or strip of

brown whisker; but it was easy to see that affectation and self-consciousness were no very strong ingredients in his composition.

Mrs. Kidd Ashbocking, nicknamed "Galopper," in playful allusion to her sloth and awkwardness of motion, might be not inaptly styled "a lumbering woman." She was unusually tall, broad, big-boned, and fat, with little of the majesty and portentousness which sometimes dignify a large frame. She had rosy cheeks, a full, good-humoured mouth, a double chin, wide eyes, with scarcely perceptible eyebrows, which seemed to have a tendency to rise, and a beaming expression of kindliness and contentment.

Despite the richness of her dress, there was a complacent untidiness about it, and even the lace and ribbons in her cap, though of the best kind, seemed carelessly muddled together. Moreover, there was a lack of congruity in the colours of her attire—bright

and various, in consistency with her love of cheerfulness. Yet she devoted much time to her appearance, and often occupied more of the attention of Miss Craggy than was pleasing to that milliner, or to be borne without bitter comment by other ladies waiting for an interview.

There was a simplicity in her manner and conversation that some would call childishness; and, indeed, she was not much wiser, as cheating tramps and begging-letter-writers knew, and certainly not much more book-learned than she had been in her girlhood, though then she haunted with unambitious constancy the lower classes at her schools.

"To be sure you look more of a man than when you left," said the lady, taking her son's hand, as he again came to her side; "and yet it doesn't seem long ago when you were a tiny boy, and I fitted on to your soft little head the white cashmere hat embroidered in

blue silk. And how proud you were of that little Scotch tweed walking-jacket, and the beautiful black gros-grain tunic for the very grand occasions!"

"They've all been shot into the dirt-bin long ago, I expect," said Storker. "But how are you, my rosy mother? Unwell, as usual, of course; but is there any specific complaint?"

"General indisposition, my dear Storker."

"Well, the indefiniteness gives me heart and hope. You look very well, notwithstanding that green shawl. Your eyebrows go up, I notice, in the old form, as if you still find much cause for astonishment in the world; but you have the old smile, as if, in spite of all, you feel fairly satisfied with life."

"Oh yes, and I'm so pleased to have you home. By-the-bye, Mr. and Mrs. Oscar are coming to dine with you here to-night. You should feel honoured. And now for your news, Storker!"

"Oh, mother, I've been used to hear myself addressed as 'Ashbocking,' and 'Storker' sounds rather unpleasant to me. Why the deuce should people be called by such names as 'Storker' and 'Kidd?' One might as well be 'Evil-Merodach' at once! What's in a name? Something, I think. One might relish a charcoal biscuit, if one didn't hear its title. Is Clara coming with her mother to-night?"

"No; she is engaged somewhere."

"Is she well?"

"Yes. Now hers is a nice name, Storker; but only think of our cousin Oscar once saying he thought of naming her 'Erinna!'—but he's a funny man—'Erinna!'"

"After Sappho's friend, you know, he told us. He might have done worse. I'm not sure I don't agree with him, that the matchless charm of classical names should justify their use in modern times. As he once said

to me, 'How unspeakably more musical is the name of "Sophocles" than that of "Thomas Johnson," his illustrator!'"

"Yes. And now sit down and tell me your news!"

"The convolutions of your ears, then, are as eagerly open to any available news as heretofore. I must tell you my adventures by degrees; for a journey from England to Philadelphia by sea, and thence to San Francisco by land, ought to furnish a good lot of material for talk to a man who looks about him a little more than a blinkered horse. But my narratives won't interest you so much as a local marriage or death, or a pungent bit of Heathhammock scandal."

"Well, I don't care to hear about savages. God forgive me! I never could care for them, nor for vulgar, rough men who look surly and never touch their hats—no, not so much as for Ariel. And don't tell me about preci-

pices and wild beasts, for the very mention of them makes my flesh crawl!"

"In the first place, I've brought you and my grandfather, the Admiral, a few presents, and my father an item or two to add to his collection of curiosities——"

"That's very kind of you," said Mr. Kidd Ashbocking, who entered the room at this moment. "Give me your hand, Storker; I appreciate your thoughtfulness. I've added somewhat to my curiosities since you left. There's a tobacco-pot of Chinese soap-stone, a horn-book and Breeches Bible, both in capital condition, a Southsea Islander's shell-headed javelin, an old watch in a rock-crystal case, a quaint muniment chest, seven intaglios, and some good specimens of the Jarva caxa! I keep my eyes open!"

"Bravo!" cried Storker cordially. "It does me good to look again on that old pate, bald as the Tarpeian rock, and that beard with a

straw adhering to it. And how are you? As in the past, I see, more indifferent to the poor fit and inelegance of your garments than a puppy to the mud upon his legs!"

Truly there was a greasiness about the lapels, back, and elbows of the tobacco-scented coat upon Mr. Kidd Ashbocking, and an uncourtly air in all his apparel down to the large and clumsy boots. Moreover, so tanned, nay, cinnamon-hued, was what little could be seen of his face, clothed, as it was, with grizzly hair, and so rough and brown were his hands, that despite his high, intellectual forehead, made more striking by his baldness, the result of typhus fever, one might be apt to think him an uncultured handicraftsman. His liking for fishing, carpentry, and gardening were accountable for the state of his hands, and probably the scratches and tenderness caused by much manual work had given him a dislike of soap and

scrubbing. The natural duskiness of his complexion had been deepened by constant out-door occupation.

His face wore a shifting, uncertain expression—benevolence, self-sufficiency, and a haunting discontent were written there. Thought was impressed there, too; but the eyes were wanting in glow and freshness, justifying the silver spectacles he wore.

Like his wife, he could not be congratulated on his grace of gait. His cousin Oscar said that his limbs in movement reminded him of Milton's description of Samson's prison-posture "at random carelessly diffused," and his shuffling, crooked walk, with outward-pointed toes, had gained him the nickname of "Crab."

Turning from him to his mother, Storker marvelled more than ever at the mysterious power of Nature, as shown in its privileging so uncomely a pair to fashion so smart a fellow as himself. "But I inherit some of

the qualities of my grandfather the Admiral," thought he.

"I didn't expect you so soon, my boy," said Mr. Kidd Ashbocking, "or I should have been at the door to welcome you."

"You've been better engaged, no doubt, father," said Storker. "You come from the bank, I take it, where you've been wrist-deep in golden coins or peering into some poor beggar's crumenal mysteries."

"Well, not exactly just now," said his father, smiling. "I was in the bank a few minutes ago, but, since, I have been in my vinery (which looks admirably), where you would have found me on my knees before the stove adjusting bits of wood between the bars with my right hand, while my left grasped a handful of cinders."

"Mother," said Storker, "do you allow him to play truant thus in business-hours? Why don't you take a leaf out of Mrs. Oscar's book?"

"Oh, I never interfere," said Mrs. Kidd. "Your father's a busy man, that's all I know, going early and late."

"Like the town-pump! And how's the banking business, father?"

"Pretty good, lad, pretty good," said Mr. Kidd, rather hurriedly. "I am very busy. Just now, too, I am especially interested in the question of agricultural improvements, and am trying to institute a local Chamber of Agriculture. I am also engaged on an exhaustive wages-calculator, based on ideas of my own!"

"Confound the agriculturists! You have enough head-work in your own business, I should have thought, without having others for ever sucking your brains. I think you look like one bothered and wearied; as if for a long time you had been hard at work all day and sitting up half the night over Malthus or Ricardo, or that ragged pencilled old Joyce's Arithmetic of yours. I thank

my stars that I shall never kill myself by a Pythagorean fondness for figures and hieroglyphics. I don't like your looks. How is it my mother hasn't put you under the doctor's care? She used to be fond enough of physic."

"Your father hasn't yet had the bad days and wearisome nights that I have had with illness," said Mrs. Kidd, shaking her head; "and he isn't a good man about physics."

"Not wholly and fully," said her husband, "for I've not much faith in them."

"Nor I," said Storker, "not a single atom of faith—not the least morsel of a fragment! By George! I believe they do as much damage in the world as the great guns that can pound a granite mountain into indigestible powders. But I've yet to learn that my mother mortifies herself by taking much physic, for all her praise of it. The discipline would militate too gravely against her

love of pastry. Talking of pastry, where's my good grandfather, the Admiral?"

"The truth is," said Mrs. Kidd, "we arranged to dine an hour earlier than usual to-night, thinking you might be glad of your dinner at five, and he has taken a walk with Ariel to the harbour for the benefit of his appetite."

"It was not wont to need much stimulus," said Storker. "There was a time when he could eat fat meat and chutney at four a.m."

"He is pretty well," said the Admiral's daughter. "The Howsegoes are not a family to fade away early. He takes good naps in the afternoon sometimes, and often sleeps so well at night we have to wait breakfast half an hour for him. On Sunday he occasionally keeps his bed till luncheon-time. I think, on the whole, his digestion continues pretty good."

"It was most good catholic and accommo-

dating. He had the digestion of a Zulu, or a tough old shell-crunching tortoise, and was as indulgent to his appetite as that man of palate, Mænius, that we used to read about in Horace, or somewhere. But I mean no disrespect towards my good grandfather. Did he ever mention me in my absence ?"

"Indeed, yes !" said Mrs. Kidd; "but you know he is no great talker about anything."

"I know he keeps his own counsel (if any)," said Storker. "He's a careful man, and doesn't dash about like a cat with a pot on his tail. But he may possibly have a secret store of wisdom (as we know he has of wealth). There's many a wise head that holds a tongue as quiet as a fly-catcher's. Besides, one who carries much more than air in his pocket ought perhaps to be content to carry little more than water in his head."

"I tell my cousin Oscar," said Mr. Kidd, "that wisdom in word is very inferior to wisdom in work."

"Your grandfather likes you, Storker," said his mother, "and says you will grow into a true Howsegoe."

"Unless I prove to have some brains in my head," said Storker aside to his father, adding aloud, "My grandfather was always very kind to me."

"His promise to pay the expenses of your American trip speaks rather emphatically for his friendship towards you," said Mr. Kidd Ashbocking.

"If I could not detect his predilection for me," said Storker, "I might as well have a truffle or a band-box on my shoulders instead of a head! It has been palpable for years, and I don't intend, my parents, to run foul of him. Between ourselves, I have thought a good deal about the old gentleman during

my travels. I wish he would stump up a little, now and then, during his life. But, depend on it, he will die rich and I shall be the gainer."

Mr. Kidd's face brightened.

"You guess rightly, I think," he said. "He has given me hints that he will act handsomely towards you and us. I know nothing of his will, nothing of his means, nor, I think, does my cousin Oscar. But we both believe he is wealthy (it was published in the newspapers, you know, that he had fifty thousand pounds bequeathed to him by his kinsman, Sir Cloudberry Tichener), and I am heartily glad of it for our sakes and yours, my boy. I hope your prospects are fairly good. I put you into the law, as a profession is a good practical basis, and you can super-add my banking business at any time. Besides the probability of a partnership in such an office as my cousin Oscar's

was very tempting. I daresay I shall retire in your favour before very long. I can then farm a little land, put some of my agricultural ideas to the test practically, and rest myself."

"Farm for amusement, you know," said Mrs. Kidd.

"Yes," said her husband; "and to develop ideas on bean-rolling, early planting of root, light tumbrils, use of chicory as horse-feed, putting colts in straw-yards on peculiar diet before breaking, pig-skin harness, and a hundred other points which will be useful to the public."

"Being a 'farmer,' except for amusement, doesn't sound well," said Mrs. Kidd. "It sounds like being a 'tradesman'!"

"Ah, mother!" said Storker, "America teaches a man to think with consummate scorn of social vanities, and to snap one's fingers at the calling of milk cream. Farmers are sensible fellows; their petitions, in a

degree, caused our law proceedings to be carried on in English !"

"Agriculture is an honourable pursuit, and so is commerce," said Mr. Kidd. "The latter is done honour to by the woolsack in the Upper House, remember."

"Doubtless and decidedly !" said Storker, "and would the Chancellor breathe many words of wisdom thereon if he hadn't a potato or some other product of agriculture inside him ?"

"You wouldn't like to go into trade, Storker," said Mrs. Kidd.

"Why not ? Do you think trade necessarily entails the close companionship of fellows whose ideas are limited to 'wholesale 'ouses,' 'a sweet thing in night-caps,' and the like ? Think of Cobden and Chevalier and Arles de Something !"

"I can only remember two friends of our family who had anything to do with trade,"

said Mrs. Kidd: "Richard Butters, who made a quantity of money out of baking-powder or bleaching-powder, and Barbara Peckel's third brother, who did something with oil."

"When you retire from the bank, father," said Storker, "I hope you'll rest from business altogether, and become as lazy as a Guacho. But that's a stupid hope, for rather than take any appreciable repose, you'd collect fleas' eyes, or build a palace of herring-bones, or start a company to supply fishes with gasworks and diving-bells."

At this juncture Mr. Kidd Ashbocking rose from his seat, with which and the surrounding furniture he harmonised but ill, saying that he must wash himself, and step over to the bank, or he would incur the displeasure of Mr. Anguish, his clerk.

He had scarcely left the room before Admiral Howsegoe entered, followed by Ariel, and, like him, breathing audibly.

CHAPTER II.

Admiral Howsegoe was an old gentleman of square and ponderous dignity, with a body that seemed to overburthen his legs, a large red bulbous nose, staring irascible eyes, heavy brows, a flushed complexion, and skin "creased," to quote his grandson, "like a sun-baked mudbank!" His eyebrows and neat hair were white, but there appeared but little impress of the mellow wisdom of age upon his broad and stolid countenance. His wanderings, as in the case of many British travellers, seemed to have enriched his complexion more conspicuously than his mind.

He bore evidence enough, however, of care for appearance, to judge from the admirably smoothed and parted hair, the velvet coat buttoned with cruel tightness, and the glossy boots fitting well to the foot, though Wellingtons, which some of the wise declare to be incapable of comeliness "on the score of their looseness at the ankle" (to quote Storker again).

The Admiral wore Wellington-boots and thick-sleeved waistcoats to hide the defects of Nature, which had given him limbs a trifle too slender to match the rest of his body gracefully.

He had been a very long time in the Navy, and had now retired on half-pay; but he was not credited with having seen much active service, except in pursuit of slave-ships on the African coast: and, though a bad breach in his head (mended most carefully and scarcely noticeable) had been by some

attributed to shot, it was generally believed that two quarts of port-wine and a sharp-edged coal-scuttle were accountable for the wound.

"And how is my ancient?" said Storker, leading the Admiral to an easy-chair. "Why, you and Ariel are emitting sounds very unlike 'the soft breathings of a listening maiden.' You have been walking briskly. How are you?"

"Pretty well, but hungry," the Admiral replied, speaking, as was his wont, with dictatorial loudness. "What cheer, young mister?"

"Oh! I've enjoyed myself stupendously—learnt all about chowders and cocktail-and-smash, seen no end of scenery from Niagara to the Mirror Lake, and had some good shooting and fishing, especially in Canada. Note my Canadian dog; a true Britisher, isn't he?"

Here much growling, and Mrs. Kidd's

anxiety for the safety of "dear Ariel," made it necessary to bring about a friendly acquaintance between him and Moloch, a task which Storker soon accomplished, his sympathetic knowledge of the canine nature overcoming Ariel's sulkiness.

For Ariel was a sulky spaniel, fat and lazy, and inappropriately named. Not by his mistress, indeed, for she was little acquainted with Shakespeare's creations, nor desired to be more so, since Miss Bowden-Botright, in a pause between two readings of Hook's Sermons at a Dorcas Meeting, had referred to him as an "indelicate fabulist!" Ariel was thus entitled by Major Foggett, who had presented him to Mrs. Kidd Ashbocking.

"Ariel is rather a mean successor to our dogs of old, mother," said Storker.

"No days like the old days, boy," said Admiral Howsegoe.

"In the matter of our dogs, I agree," said Storker. "Can you recollect 'Baltic,' the grand Danish hound, and 'Epicure,' the pure-bred turnspit, and 'Dreadnought,' the reposeful Newfoundland? What pets I have had in my time here!—a hawk, an owl, a jackdaw, an Australian piping crow, an ash-coloured parrot, a tortoise, and a hedgehog! Clara used to like to watch and help me to feed these things; but she couldn't see the owl eat a mouse or the hawk a bird, and she would never keep anything in captivity herself. I've no doubt she's still the patroness of the animal world. She went to extremes, but one must admire her kindness."

Admiral Howsegoe turned stiffly, and stared hard at his grandson.

"The man's a fool, sir," he said, "who does not admire her!"

"Oh, yes!" said Mrs. Kidd. "We all

admire kindness, of course. I always feel sorry for poor dumb things, and wish people to be kind to them. I always feel I ought to carve a poor fowl tenderly, though of course it's past feeling then, though it has lost the protection of its feathers. The Howsegoes were always kind to the helpless."

"They appreciate worth," said Admiral Howsegoe. "A wretched lot are the girls of the present day; but Clara Ashbocking could command the notice of the best man of my acquaintance. Mark that, young mister."

"Ancient!" cried Storker, turning upon him. "Now that Clara has rejected Bethell Ormerod and the Reverend Mr. Audrey, do you want me to take a turn with her? In a word, I am not a marrying man. I like Clara as a cousin—let that suffice! I have no opinion of the sex. I scarcely know a girl that's worth a rag, or the thousandth part of a bad farthing!"

The hues of the Admiral's face deepened as he rejoined with asperity :

"To the devil with your bachelors, who care for nothing but their stomachs, guns, and dogs—that's all I've got to say!"

"I've certainly a strong affection for dogs," said Storker, with conciliatory good-humour : "shrewd, faithful fellows, with their strange knowledge of persons, places, and things. I would come down in the middle of a winter's night to feed one I had forgotten. There were always dogs' paw-marks on the drugget at my London lodgings, and sometimes stains by my chair where dogs' morsels were thrown. I can't be happy without two or three dogs here, mother, and you must prepare yourself to see a good portion of a sheep, or a limb or two of horse, brought on the premises for their sustenance."

"Well, I never!" cried Mrs. Kidd; "but, talking of dogs, I have just thought of it—

Don't you remember, father, when we were staying at Hillshithe, how some boisterous greyhounds were out for exercise, and you spoke to them, and they rolled you over and over, and you were stout then; and, oh, my gracious! so hot and angry, and scurried away as quickly as any donkey could gallop!"

This reminiscence seemed to increase the Admiral's choler. He did not reply, but sulkily demanded some brandy in a cup of tea.

"This walk," said he, "has made me more than hungry: confoundedly faint. I'm not a fly to be flitting about fantastically all day. Ring the bell, young mister. Save me that task, now you're at home. Your mother is getting so stout, she ought to have taken turns with me in this. And now, Arabella," he added, turning to his daughter, "what of the menu for dinner?"

With some difficulty she informed him,

and the result was not much to his satisfaction it would seem, for he twice broke in with unpleasant questions, viz :—

"Am I to eat nothing better than mould, like a worm?" and, "Can I live on any bit of rubbish, like a rat or a rook?"

The advent of the tea and brandy made him more placid ; but, after taking a few sips, he said :

"To the devil with Mrs. Oscar! She will half take away my appetite to-night."

"Do her habits still annoy you?" asked Storker. "Does she still look at a penny carefully before she parts with it, and does it then leave her full of sorrow and perturbation?"

"She's the same mean woman as ever," said Admiral Howsegoe ; "and yet she had the impudence to tell a tradesman here, that no one spends so little in the town as I! Living in this house, what need? Let her

look at home. She has a lean and a hungry soul."

"Thank God, she can't say I'm mean," said Mrs. Kidd, "though I'm connected by marriage with her. The connection won't make me like her, will it ?"

"Your being both Ashbockings, "said Storker, "connects you no more than a green wall-paper and a meadow are connected by being both of a colour. Because the first is unhealthy, would you say the second must be also ? But I must not speak slightingly of one who is coming to do honour to me this night."

"Or to take stock of you," said the Admiral, "with a view to make some use of you hereafter, young mister."

"Do you think, then, that kinship is only appreciated by her in that it may be utilised, as the cannibal may utilise his relations, by devouring them ?"

"I wish she wasn't coming to dinner,"

said Admiral Howsegoe, "that's all I've got to say."

It was soon time to prepare for this dinner, and Mr. Kidd Ashbocking, generally more punctual in leaving than on entering the Bank, came home for the purpose. Storker, therefore, having housed his dog in one of the four kennels in the back garden, went upstairs. Peeping in at his father's dressing-room as he passed, his eye fell upon the model frigate, made by a retired butcher many years ago, and the inaccuracies in the rigging of which the banker had often enough pointed out laughingly since, and upon the toy-theatre with which Mr. Kidd used, at times, to entertain the friends of his youth, till certain tittering young spectators, one night, annihilated a puppet with a volley of nutshells.

In his grandfather's dressing-room he saw the old massive chest, reputed to hold the keys

to the mysteries of that wealthy man. Little else attracted the eye in the ship-shape room, for the bergamot-scented, *palma Christi* oil for the hair, and the depilatory made of oak-polypody, were, like those keys, concealed from the gaze of the curious.

"Storker," cried his mother, slowly stumping upstairs, just as he was entering his own room, "I've been using your room, my dear, for some of my things, and I'm not sure I didn't call the maid away to another job before she could clear them all out."

Yes, indeed. Upon the bed, with its pink-lined white muslin curtains, lay a tiger-skin mat, a cake of oil-nut soap, a cambric collar, and a black velvet cassock; on a chair, a dress of mouse-grey Spanish wool, and a work-box with the cathedral of Cashel on its lid; and on the drawers a lady's night-cap, a yellow leather belt and a boot.

"Chaos and Phlegethon!" exclaimed

Storker good-humouredly. "Why, I see scarcely a thing here belonging to me, mother, except my trio of Ferneley's hunting pictures, my Egan's 'Boxiana,' my Whitehead's 'Gymnasiad,' and my straw hat with the mallard's feather."

Before descending from his room he looked from the pleasant open window upon the sea.

Its broad breast, heaving tranquilly, was speckled and streaked with sun-gleams, and, where the shadows of the floating clouds fell, there was cheery abundance of white light in its waters. There was a sweet modesty in its musical utterance as it splashed down its fountain-fringe on the freshened stones and girdled them with bubbling frills of froth, as though to ask man's praise for this little art-work on the shore were unworthy of the mighty sphere which breathes health across all lands, and shows such merciful favour to those trespassers, our ships, and nourishes the myriads of fish for human food.

As Storker looked at this simple scene of quiet beauty and listened to the liquid sound as calmly beautiful—both soothing to the long-bustling traveller—the fair face of gentle Clara flitted before his mind, and the Admiral's words in praise of her were in his ears.

"But I'm an unmitigated jackass," he thought, suddenly rousing himself. "These jolly past months have settled my mind. Independent bachelorhood, travel, life, sport in season, and money to spend! Besides, my opinion of the sex, since I was wronged by a certain lady, is so very poor, and it's not likely to be altered."

But as he looked at the sky, in turning from the window, there were signs of April inconstancy in some shifting clouds in the South. And his eyes, on travelling to earth again, fell upon Mr. Oxburrow, the brewer (father of four marriageable daughters), who was bowing politely to him from the cliff path.

CHAPTER III.

THE Ashbockings were of an ancient family, not claiming, indeed, so romantic an origin as the Howsegoes, who spoke of themselves as the descendants, collaterally, of a crusader who encamped before Jerusalem, and lineally of a warrior who fell at Tewkesbury—but tracing back their genealogy to a prudent artisan who, in 1567, married the daughter of a Flemish immigrant and worked as a weaver with his father-in-law.

The artisan's descendants, improving in substance and position, had intermingled with the Kidds, Normans, and Storkers, Suffolk families, and there were several Ashbockings of

good standing in the Eastern counties. But, at the time my history begins, they seem to have fallen away, leaving as their sole representatives the families of our two Heathhammock friends, Mr. Oscar Norman Ashbocking and Mr. Kidd Ashbocking, his cousin.

Both of these gentlemen filled posts which their respective fathers and grandfathers had filled before them, so that the name was a familiar one in the town. In the church, indeed, was a rose window in memory of a Norman Ashbocking, and a tablet of Forest-of-Dean stone, with gold-diapered panel, in memory of a Kidd Ashbocking; and the name of Ashbocking was conspicuous in the churchyard under the chancel windows.

Heathhammock being a borough under the "Municipal Corporations Act," and governed by such understanding spirits as could be found among a mayor, four aldermen, and a dozen councillors with the help

of a bench of borough justices, Mr. Oscar Ashbocking, as town clerk and justices' clerk, was an important public character. To his custody were entrusted all the charters, transcripts of charters, records and documents relating to the charities, the church, and the common; and all the minute and account books of the corporation and its committees. He also filled the office of treasurer (formerly chamberlain), and was clerk to the vestry, the harbour commissioners, the church and school committees, and the lifeboat trustees.

He had a large and long-established business of fine quality—the carriages of such clients as Lord Thimblestone-Leigh and Sir James Addlebanny being often seen at his door—and was a good lawyer, soundly versed in theory (though in his leisure hours now he preferred unprofessional reading) diligent and energetic in practice, and, if at times wanting in tact, of fair judgment in emergencies.

Conveyancing was his favourite branch of business, but as justices' clerk he gave proof of intimacy with criminal law, and in litigious procedure was alert. He conducted to successful issues two important actions for the corporation: "the mere management of the numerous witnesses at the assize-town requiring," he remarked, "about as much skill as the retreat of the Ten Thousand."

Of course he was not absolutely free from censure, or without clients who could point out, with oracular stupidity, that certain advice given them by him had issued rather to his own than to their advantage: but he was popular and of acknowledged honour, and the standard of moral feeling in his office was high.

Like all the Ashbockings of recent times he was, by nature, generous; but his shrewd and thrifty wife, who brought him a large sum of money and a more valuable gift of keen

counsel, cordial sympathy, and prudent help, had by degrees so deeply instilled into him the habits of economy that he rarely spent a shilling without a qualm, would often travel in a third-class railway-carriage, and would rather, I believe, lift up ten children to look at a sixpenny picture-book in a shop window than purchase it for one of them. In all his dealings he became most wary. "As money is nowadays the mainspring of so much of the machinery of life," he would say, "one hardly needs the advice of Pliny Junior on the subject of bad bargains."

He was naturally easy enough of access, but his wife's constant warnings made him cautious of addressing in the street, or admitting into his office those to whom he could not "book an attendance" with any hope of payment, or whose business he could not charge against the corporation in the large and convenient list of "Special professional services!"

No man disliked quarrels and wranglings, in his heart, more than he; but how could such a taste find indulgence in a lawyer's office? True he was ready to compromise out of court disputes among his poorer neighbours, who could cause much trouble, but could not afford the costs of lawsuits. "Why," he would say, "should you, like Italy, be impoverished by costly warfare?" But if a person of substance thought fit to risk a portion of it in litigation, he (ever under his good wife's influence) seemed to view the frailty with more complacency.

In his office he was cautious and reticent, as became a professional recipient of many secrets; but, apart from business, as he said of himself, A'Kempis would not have commended him for his "reserve in speaking." He was a great reader, one who would master a book that interested him without cutting the top edges of the leaves,

and a great conversationalist, very proud of the queer stores of knowledge he had gathered in his readings. "I don't wish 'to get entangled by habits of detail,' as Macintosh remarks," he said one day while talking of the antics of the Satyrs and Sileni. "A lawyer is apt to fall into that snare."

He would discourse on any subject, from Hafiz to a fly-blown mushroom, and often at some length. "My harangues," he once confessed, "have not always what Boswell claimed for some of Ogden's sermons, 'the merit of being short,' and they might not have satisfied Bishop Andrews on the point of conciseness." But he took as great delight in them as Cicero did in the higher order of oratory.

He was a Rugbeian; but, though always a hard reader, made no great mark at school, owing, it is said, to his continual swervings from the fixed routine of study, and to his

dislike of supplanting his mates in class. Once one of his masters, after a short exasperating argument with him, stigmatised him as a vain, chattering lad, with strange learning, but deficient withal, who, if he made a map of the world, would very likely elaborate parts admirably, and leave out Africa. But this person afterwards apologised for his censure, and civilly urged his pupil to exchange his widely-varying studies, rich though their fruitage might seem, for a systematic course.

Until, however, he came under the influence of his wife, no systematic procedure was acceptable to Mr. Oscar Ashbocking; and, as she did not turn a very exactingly watchful eye upon his leisure doings, his reading was still of the old desultory sort, whereof his conversation (out of the office) generally bore evidence.

When at home he spent almost every

evening in his large study, among his mighty store of books, most of which he had received from his father and ancestors, but some of which he had himself purchased—for book-stalls held out the most tempting of baits to his carefully-guarded purse. He was usually attended in his study by George Hern, his shorthand-writer, and numerous, sometimes, were the volumes which these two would in one evening displace from the old oak and newer laburnum shelves. Not but that they were regularly put back by Hern. Had that task been neglected now and again, "it would," as the methodical Mrs. Oscar said, "be worth a hundred pounds a year to keep the place in order." Yet Mr. Oscar's office was uniformly neat.

There was a firm and time-strengthened bond of affection between our town-clerk and his wife, though there mingled with his more tender feelings towards her a certain

awe, evidenced in the moulding of his character under her direction, and, indeed, in his very manner in her presence, especially in his habit of glancing often, and somewhat narrowly, at her when she spoke with unusual emphasis.

She was proud of him, often alluding to him as a "perfect gentleman" and "a scholar," and was seldom known to rebel against a good dose of his loquacity, though she would rather grub up weeds with a fork than listen to much eloquent speech from any other lips. "One great advantage of your father's talk," she once said to her daughter, "is that it doesn't call for any pertinent reply. It's beyond you and me and most people, and so mixed up with learned quotation and what not, that one is justified in not making any great effort to understand it."

Mr. Kidd Ashbocking, like his cousin,

received from his father a good, long-standing business, but, whereas the solicitor's had steadily improved under its present guide, the banker's had lapsed, though as yet manifesting no conspicuous outward symptoms, into an unhealthy state.

The collapse, in recent years, of the great house of Bonchurch, Spott, and Jewell, who had a branch bank at Heathhammock, secured to Mr. Kidd many additional customers, and acted as a temporary balm to the wounds of his business—but a temporary balm only.

He, also, was educated at Rugby, and was rather a shining light in mathematics and elementary science. In his play-hours he made models with great mechanical skill, and used to speak of his cousin as a "talker," and of himself as a "practical man."

Neither as a boy nor as a man could he be called indolent. On the contrary, he was

always in some way employed. But as a banker, though he did not lack energy in his conduct of the business, and believed himself, and in the matter of advice to others proved himself, to be of sound business capacity, he could not be said to devote his heart entirely, or with sufficient earnestness, to the important object of earning money. The surly and plodding Mr. Anguish often thought him phlegmatic, unpunctual, and careless. He would stay to fill up a petty tradesman's income-tax return, while Mr. Roudham, of Roudham Manor, was wrathfully waiting to communicate weighty business. Commending and undertaking practical work of all kinds, he did not duly respect that which was profitable.

Prosperity, therefore, was enjoyed by one of the cousins only. Nor was this the sole point of contrast. Mr. Kidd's natural profuseness and generosity, emphatically ruling

qualities, though his individual tastes were simple and inexpensive, received encouragement, and not wholesome check from his wife. Seldom, also, were random steps of his guided aright by her advice, or business cares relieved by her sympathetic interest. Ever conscious of the shadow on his prospects, yet striving to brighten this by a vague hope of improvement, and, meanwhile, withdrawing his attention from it, he gave busy exercise to his humours as unrewarded helper of others, mathematician, mechanic, architect, agriculturalist, and so forth. The stimulating efficacy of calamity was in a manner illustrated in him, as in many others recorded in history, but did not in his case operate to profitable ends. While his cousin enjoyed the peace arising from regular habits, a firm-fixed, fruitful pursuit, good prospects, and well-earned leisure, he was without rest and without contentment.

As a few other distinguishing marks, I will add that Mr. Oscar was a Conservative in politics, Mr. Kidd an advanced Liberal. Mr. Oscar was orthodox in religion, though most catholic and indulgent in his private views; Mr. Kidd was rather unsettled and heretical in his opinions, though no abettor or protector of wickedness. Mr. Oscar was the most abstemious of men; Mr. Kidd partook with relish of port-wine and Irish whisky, and smoked much tobacco. Mr. Oscar, appreciating the approval of others, would occasionally "go into polite society," where he could yield proof of his culture; Mr. Kidd disliked social ceremonies, and, to the regret of his wife, preferred the company of the humble. Mr. Oscar was always neat in his attire, while Mr. Kidd's untidiness has been mentioned.

These cousins, about equal in self-sufficiency, had each some contempt for the

other's lack of his own peculiar tendencies; but on some subjects Mr. Kidd adjusted his taste and judgment in accordance with those of the successful and bookish Oscar; and the latter respected in moderation the mathematical, and more the mechanical, prowess of his cousin. "As a boy," he would say, "he made toys, like Robert Hooke, and, like him, should be Curator of Experiments!"

There were as many points of contrast in the wives of these Ashbockings. Mrs. Oscar being rigidly plain in her dress, stern of manner, indisposed to smile, disposed to admonish, punctual and exact in all her habits, courageous, watchful, restless, inflexible of judgment, and worldly-wise.

They might both be considered prone to talkativeness; but Mrs. Kidd spoke with somewhat of a drawl, while Mrs. Oscar dealt out her words with rapidity, as if they could not be stopped, and ended her sentence often

with strange abruptness, as if she feared that her tongue had already outraged prudence.

Neither of the ladies could gather much amusement from books; but, whereas Mrs. Kidd would probably fall asleep over an early page, Mrs. Oscar, who never dozed in the day-time, would suffer her thoughts to wander to the practical life around her.

Mrs. Kidd was not an industrious woman, though she would sometimes busy herself with a little embroidery or crewel-work. Mrs. Oscar would use her needle energetically, carried a pair of draper's scissors in her pocket, and had with her own hands knitted six cloth-fringe hearth-rugs, each entailing above eighty thousand skilful motions of the wrist.

Mrs. Kidd liked to spend a short time in her flower-garden; Mrs. Oscar preferred her vegetable-beds. Mrs. Kidd had musical tastes, and interested herself greatly in the

choir at church; Mrs. Oscar cared for no music but from the hand and voice of her daughter. Mrs. Kidd took part in the Dorcas meetings, district-visitings, and other church-work; Mrs. Oscar limited her help to a good subscription—I say "good," for she would not allow her frugality to operate to her husband's discredit in a printed list. In orthodoxy the Admiral's daughter excelled; in downright honour and integrity the other.

In domestic matters the genial and kindly Mrs. Kidd was a muddler, a shirker of the kitchen, and wasteful; Mrs. Oscar was systematic, of Netherlandish neatness, and a haunter of the servants' quarters. She was, as her husband would say, quoting Murphy, "of good household understanding."

Mrs. Kidd was most popular among the tradesfolk; but Mrs. Oscar (sarcastically alluded to sometimes as "Grab" and "Nipper") was apt to incur wrath by troublesome

demands, to scrutinise stock which she did not purchase, and by efforts to cheapen wares. She was, moreover, known to keep and use scales and steel-yards at home.

The Oscar Ashbockings had but one child, Clara, well-beloved of both her parents. She had been educated at Kensington, and had spent a year in France and one in Germany, at the close of her school career.

Since she had settled at Heathhammock with her parents she had not been free from suitors, as might be gathered from one of Storker's remarks. Some reason for the discomfiture of two desirable wooers will be brought to light hereafter.

The Kidd Ashbockings had, also, but one child, our friend Storker, who, like his father and uncle, had been placed at Rugby, whence, he informed his friends, he had carried some liberal notions, shin-bruises, and horrible reminiscenses of Georgics, botany, and Greek

accents. He was afterwards articled to Mr. John Slade, of the eminent firm of Whitbread, Slacker, Slade, and Wapentake, solicitors, Waterloo Place, W.C.

During his third year in London, and often afterwards, he met at Mr. Wapentake's and elsewhere the handsome Miss Jane Leeke-Strangways, who seems to have given him cause to regard himself as a favourite; for, after a time, he offered her his hand with little fear as to the result. She, however, rejected it in favour of that of Mr. Wimpling, a Queen's Counsel, of forty-five, with a large income and six unruly children. This uncomplimentary choice it was which imbued our unfledged attorney's criticisms on the gentle sex with a somewhat unmanly severity.

Admiral Howsegoe had resided at Castle House ever since his retirement from the navy. He was a widower, and, as may

already be guessed, a man of mystery. He personally received his half-pay in London, by arrangement, once a year, and what became of it no one in Heathhammock knew. Certainly no one there saw much of it, for seldom did coin of his pass over a tradesman's counter. He would sometimes step into a shop for a short gossip, most frequently selecting that of Mr. Bultitude, the chemist, where he could help himself to cloves free of charge, or that of Mr. Sparrow, the confectioner, to whose peppermints he was partial. His peculiarities were, however, tolerated, for he was a member of an ungrudging household, and his secret wealth threw a charm around him.

CHAPTER IV.

VERY soon after Storker had descended to the drawing-room Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Ashbocking were ushered in.

Mr. Oscar was a fair man, rather above the middle height, with a broad forehead and large green-grey eyes, which Storker had often called "as undesigning as a rabbit's," and which, with the readily-smiling mouth, gave our town-clerk a look of trustworthiness and suavity. He seemed to be still possessed of much vigour, though he had passed the middle age, and the close application of a diligent lawyer and an earnest student had left its mark upon him in the slightly bent

shoulders, a few faded threads in the light-brown hair, and the lack of flexibility in the pale, but not yet drooping, cheeks.

Mrs. Oscar was tall and had a quasi-military stiffness of bearing. Her face was a fine one with strong and good features; but the overhanging brow and the hard lines behind the nostrils gave her an exacting and censorious expression, and the downward tendency of the corners of the eyes and of the lips would lead one to guess that certain wrinkles on the nose were not produced by frequent laughter. The eyes were cold, but keen, and took their circuits of observation none the less profitably that they seldom opened fully. The pale pink lips were rather pinched, but mobile and sensitive, and besides their before-mentioned downward-curving tendency, had another of half breaking into somewhat bitter smiles. They looked, moreover, strangely well fitted to serve as a battery of hard-

hitting words, and in seasons of great annoyance would really seem to be shaping unuttered oaths.

In her movements there was an eager activity, a sort of bustling, elbowing, and persistent zeal, as of one who had learnt that the world has many stumbling-blocks, and who is ready to surmount them. She wore a dress of dusky silk, and displayed no ornament but a small jet necklace. Her rippling hair was drawn neatly back from her forehead, and much of her head was hidden beneath the plainest of caps, made of spotted tulle and a little lace. It was vaguely hinted that there had been a time when her hair was abundant, elaborately dressed, and much admired, and when its owner made wax flowers and illuminated texts artistically. But Mrs. Oscar was not communicative on the subject of her early days, which were as thickly muffled in mystery as those of Anderida. Her childhood

and youth were passed far away from Heathhammock, in the north of England.

She advanced rather abruptly to Storker as he entered the room.

"I am glad to see you again," she said. "No doubt I ought to sit on the sofa till you come to me, but I'm a strong-minded female, you know, and I wish to show you plainly that I welcome you."

Storker was gratified to receive so unusually cordial a shake of the hand, for sometimes this lady, to quote her own words, "would make her fingers almost as stiff as blackthorn spears." I must make the strange confession that at the same moment the thought flashed through his mind that she, like his grandfather, desired now to secure him as a husband for Clara.

Pardon his egoism. Storker had not during his periodical visits to Heathhammock considered his father's business at all

carefully. He esteemed him, despite his peculiarities, a prosperous man, who could not, indeed, be otherwise with such a good old banking concern at his back. The only son of such a father and the favourite of Admiral Howsegoe (to leave all else out of the argument) had some cause to think himself worthy of the attention of the unmarried.

"Are you quite well?" he asked.

"No," replied Mrs. Oscar, who did not often practice ceremony of speech, "I have been plagued with neuralgia lately."

"An execrable and abominable complaint!" said Storker, turning to greet Mr. Oscar. "I am sorry Clara could not come to-night," he added, eyeing the lady again; "I hope she is well."

"Are you then so altered as to ask politely about a female?" said Mrs. Oscar, returning his gaze; "I believe she is well."

"Frank personage as you are, you qualify

some of your answers respecting others as heretofore, I observe," said Storker, smiling. "If I were to ask if Clara had grown since I last saw her I shouldn't be surprised to hear you, in a cool and cautious moment, answer: 'I've not measured her.'"

The town-clerk looked at his proposed partner as if in some wonder at his boldness, but before he could speak Admiral Howsegoe entered, rubicund and portentous.

"Dinner due, and Bella and Kidd not down, of course!" he growled, after gruffly saluting the guests.

"Without wishing to offend our friend Storker," said Mrs. Oscar, "I must say I should have thought you would have known this household long enough, Admiral, to get inured to unpunctuality."

"I admire Cobbett for many things," said Mr. Oscar, "but especially for his punctuality."

"You must console my grandfather, sir," said Storker, "by some quotations as to the advantage of subjugating the animal propensities."

"I expect," said Mr. Oscar, "that the Admiral, like Charles Surface in the play, would prefer to 'proceed to business without further ceremony'—the business being dinner."

"A man's a fool, sir," said Admiral Howsegoe, "who doesn't like to have his dinner at the proper time, however ordinary the meal."

A short conversation on Storker's travels ensued until the mistress of Castle House appeared in a head-dress over-thronged with flowers, a ponderous dead-gold brooch and other conspicuous adornments.

"The changing of dresses becomes more and more troublesome to me," she said, "and really it seems a pity that it should be necessary and proper. There's that motto in the

frame over our washstand, 'Know thyself;' but how is one to know one's self if one is for ever changing one's clothes. But where's Kidd? He finished his dressing some time ago."

Admiral Howsegoe rang the bell in ire, and Mr. Kidd was brought from his study, where he was found seated, in but seedy attire, with a Pholas shell before him, the beautiful lines of which he was trying to trace on a talipot leaf with the point of a packing-needle.

The party then repaired to the dining-room, a lofty and large apartment, with short oak wainscot, salmon-coloured and well-pictured walls, and solid crimson furniture.

Ariel followed the soup from the kitchen, and seating himself beside his mistress, seemed to enjoy the fragrance which pervaded the room, and which fragrance was, in fact, of a kind to gladden the heart of Admiral Howsegoe in the teeth of his ungracious criticism.

"Storker has come to smarten us up, Mary Ann," said Mr. Kidd, opening the conversation.

"You should be grateful for a little smartening up, Kidd," said Mrs. Oscar—"Excuse my interference; but the cayenne to the Admiral, if you please, Bilge!" she added.

"Perhaps I should be grateful," said Mr. Kidd; "but I did not allude to dress. You women think so much of appearances."

"I am no admirer of smartness," said Mrs. Oscar, with a side glance at Mrs. Kidd's head-dress; "but I like neatness and cleanliness, not tobacco-scent to excess, you know."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mrs Kidd, mildly, "he is such a smoker. Really, I sometimes almost expect to see the smoke coming out of his pockets and sleeves. But I don't mind the scent, though it makes Ariel sneeze; only I hope it's not the tobacco that makes Kidd so

brown. But it doesn't matter much; every one knows him, and it's a treat to see how many touch their hats to him in the street!"

"You must excuse me, Kidd," said Mrs. Oscar, "for you know I like to utter my thoughts. I really was vexed to see you in the coat you wore to-day in the bank. Upon the sleeves of that coat I think there must be daubs of tobacco-juice, glue, gravy, butter, ink, and candle-grease!"

"I will discard the coat, Mary Ann," said Mr. Kidd. "It has suffered somewhat in some recent chemical experiments. I should like you to see the exquisite purple flame I produced from strontian and spirits of wine when you were all asleep last night."

"Bella," said Mrs. Oscar, with a very sarcastic smile, "you and your newly-recovered son, and the Admiral, your father, may one night be blown to fragments!"

"Gracious!" cried Mrs. Kidd. "I never

liked the chemicals and combustibles, but I never interfere."

"To the devil with them!" said Admiral Howsegoe. "I've done with gunpowder now!"

"I stand, or rather sit, in no fear of death by combustion, and shall so lie down at night," said Storker. "My good father was always—not to speak disrespectfully—as fond of experiments as an ass of carrots; but he knows what he is about. Not but that combustibles ought hardly to be left very near so warm a body as my capsicum-loving grandfather."

The Admiral lifted his choleric eyes from his wing of boiled chicken, and fixed them on his grandson suspiciously. But it was well known that he would often receive uncomplimentary remarks from this favoured youth with uncommon mildness. On this occasion it is doubtful whether he intended

to respond; for Mr. Oscar, availing himself of the short silence, hastened into a small discourse on chemistry, and especially on certain opinions of Heeren. At its conclusion Storker congratulated him on his unabated powers of table-talk, which, he said, would always supply amusement and mental dainties on the dullest days at Heathhammock.

"Thank you, Storker," said Mr. Oscar, not observing the young man's twinkling eye, "and so you have made up your mind to settle at Heathhammock altogether?"

"Well I hope to make a more enduring pause than a meteor's, sir," said Storker, "that is, if you'll allow me."

Mrs. Oscar turned sharply upon the speaker. His twinkling eye had not been unobserved of her.

"You are rather bold and active of tongue," she said, but not unkindly. "Do

you intend to work at your profession earnestly?"

"I intend to try to amass unreckonable wealth."

"Let us hope you will keep the business together," said Mrs. Oscar, beginning to feel some resentment at his flippancy. "You will never be an Oscar Ashbocking."

"No; but I must do my best," said Storker, bowing with a smile. "I shall be glad to take advice from you or Mr. Oscar, now or at any time. I trust, by the way, that the exigencies of my profession will never demand such an accommodation of principle as will do violence to my ethical sensibility."

"No such exigencies shall be recognised in my office," said Mr. Oscar Ashbocking.

"There is no sharp practice in my husband's business," said Mrs. Oscar. "I know the value of friends, but if any one asserts

that there is sharp practice there, that person is my enemy."

"No one will assert this, I hope, Mary Ann," said the solicitor soothingly, for he observed by the shuffling of her hands among her knives and forks that his wife was irritated; "and I also hope that Storker will maintain the existing state of things if he joins and succeeds me."

Here followed a few sentences on the opinions of Seneca, Rollin, and others as to the influence for good or evil of persons in any degree of eminence.

"Storker will give you satisfaction," said Mrs. Kidd when an opportunity offered. "He'll become a clever lawyer enough."

"There are doubtless few mothers in Heathhammock," said Mrs. Oscar, "who do not think their children very meritorious. But do you know much of the law, Bella, that you make such a statement as your last?"

"No, Mary Ann," interposed Mr. Kidd, "Bella spoke incautiously; I could point out plague-spots in the law which call for the medicine of Reform; and I have, ere this, analyzed the evidence in celebrated cases, and made epitomes of which Oscar need not be ashamed—but we pretend to no knowledge of law. We are aware that one who wishes to keep on friendly terms with you must pretend to no such knowledge. The amateur lawyer is your bugbear and abomination."

"The lawyer's is a profession in which no one can hold his own without long and hard study," said Mr. Oscar. "I say nothing of the illuminati of the law—men who could solve in a moment such points as whether tithe was levied on the aftermath of woad in a certain year or whether ejectment would lie in the case of a fishery or a salt-boilery, or pannage. I simply ask an amateur lawyer to glance at 'Lyttleton's Institutes,' which Coke

called 'the most perfect and absolute work that has ever been written in any human science.' This book (with which every lawyer should have some acquaintance) may lead him to doubt whether he can safely meddle with the law."

"I am aware of the value of caution, but I assert that your amateur can only cheat lawyers of their legitimate fees and bring people into trouble with a parcel of blundering guesswork," cried Mrs. Oscar. "Of course he can dabble, but I have no patience with ignorant dabblers!"

"Nor I," said Storker. "A donkey can strike a spark from a stone, but would make a poor display of fireworks. Why I, a student of law, know as much about Lyttleton as a baby about uttering forged notes, and an amateur would turn in terror from it as from an old man's thrice-told autobiography."

"Well, I'm glad I have not to learn any

law," said Mrs. Kidd. "But I thought I heard Oscar say the other day that to know a little of everything was now-a-days the fashion."

"Fashion!" exclaimed Mrs. Oscar, "I sometimes think, Arabella (I hope I don't misjudge you), that you are getting very fond of fashion. Mind it doesn't lead you into folly and vanity, so that we see you carrying out the old saying of 'eating custard with a fork.'"

"Fashion and its humbug shall never have countenance from me!" said Mr. Kidd.

"You should view my statement, Arabella, with its context and conditionals," said Mr. Oscar, enlarging upon it then and there.

At the close of his remarks he opened a new line of conversation, by hailing the arrival of Storker as a boon to Heathhammock.

"An infusion of young blood," he said, "is always beneficial. Our borough wants a

little impetus. It was once a place of some importance, though not mentioned in the tract 'De portibus maris,' attributed, but not unanimously, to Sir Matthew Hale. I'm afraid you may find the town rather dull, and the Suffolk dialect (taken note of by the bold and learned Balbi) may strike you as rather unpleasant after your sojourn in London and your wanderings in America, of which place, by the way, I am sadly ignorant, being—like Quintus Curtius—inaccurate in geography. And, as to Africa, my ideas of it are mainly derived from Lucan, Lebrun, Strabo, the poet Freiligrath, and old John Barrow."

"Oh, I think I can content myself with Heathhammock as my head-quarters," said Storker. "I like it immensely well for its old associations, and for the quiet air of long-established respectability which seems to pervade it. It's as clean as a pearl, compared with many confounded towns I have

lately visited; and even its few unfragrant by-ways seem to take a charm of sea-freshness from the honest fish-wives mending nets at their doorways."

"You are no doubt pleased with its old solid houses," said Mr. Kidd, "that have withstood the brush of ten thousand violent winds, and its cottages half-built of timber and wrung out of shape, but firm as ever. Compare these with the modern cheap, damp, showy villas they build round London now."

"To the horror of Mr. Ruskin," said Mr. Oscar.

And then followed an harangue upon that eloquent writer's opinions.

"As to the quietude of Heathhammock," said Storker, in due time, "that's one of its charms."

"The tradespeople are not of that opinion," said Mr. Kidd. "It's not very cheering to be able to walk from end to end of Cliff

Street in the day-time without meeting any one. This was positively my experience a few days ago when I took my design for a cider-mill to Mr. Oxburrow, who was at the 'Lug Sail.'"

"Perhaps we can clap more energy into the place then," said Storker—"have a tramway or railway for instance."

"No doubt being ten miles from the nearest railway station counterbalances the slight advantage of rather cheap labour here," said Mr. Kidd.

"Heathhammock is too poor and too thick-headed a town to get a railway," said Admiral Howsegoe.

"I am not sure my husband would benefit by one," said Mrs. Oscar, "or Kidd either. It might tempt a rival banker and a rival lawyer to the place, to gall you both in your latter days."

"It would compensate you even for that

inconvenience," said Mr. Kidd, "by vastly improving the value of your property here. Your twenty cottages in Ashbocking Street, to view the matter practically—"

"I think I express my husband's opinion when I say that we are contented with our property as it is," said Mrs. Oscar. "One railway-scheme has failed miserably already; and Oscar has not received his costs in the matter to this day. The Admiral's glass is empty, Bella."

"I am hopeful of brighter times," said Mr. Kidd, rather dolefully. "I should be sorry to see Heathhammock continue in its present plight—to say nothing of dropping astern. Its pulse is sluggish, and there is a suspicion of grass in Cliff Street."

"It's a poor place," said Admiral Howsegoe, "and would not be worth living in, if it were not for the visitors who bring some money and manners in the season."

"If that stout Stock Exchange friend you picked up last year comes again, Admiral," said Mr. Kidd, "I should like to ask him here. He will perhaps reveal some Capel Court mysteries to us."

"We shall not be ashamed to show him our house," said Mrs. Kidd; "and Storker will have a comfortable home whatever may be said against the town."

"Granted," said Storker, looking round at the pictures approvingly.

"Yes," said Mrs. Oscar, observing him; "he ought to be comfortable if great expenditure can give comfort, and costly pictures."

"Our modern Cresippus, your father, has, as some old writer puts it, 'not a few landskips and pleasant pieces of perspective,' Storker," said Mr. Oscar.

"Are you fond of comfort?" asked Mrs. Oscar, again turning upon Storker in her abrupt way.

"In degree," he replied. "I don't like a feather-bed with chickens' feet in it."

"Are you fond of amusement?" she continued. "For remember, you will, to some extent, affect my husband's reputation."

"I like cricket and fishing, and riding and shooting," he replied. "I hope before long to renew my acquaintance with the old Ant river, and the marshes outside the town, and to try my aim at a curlew or plover, or red shank or snipe, or heron, or wild-duck."

"Talking of wild-duck," said Mr. Oscar, "I shall never forget the day I accompanied Kidd and Bethell Ormerod in search of these birds on Benstead Broad. It was one public holiday. They said I looked fagged, and led me away just as I was comparing Oldmixon and Daniel. I cannot describe our position and trials. I was miserable!"

"I can picture you," said Storker, "lurking in muddy water to your waist till your marsh

boots (if you had any) got so full of it they had to stand you on your head to let it trickle out, as it did, down your shivering back. Your next movement, perhaps, was to stumble and drop your gun into so deep a hole that, after vainly trying to make a chain to reach it of your collar, necktie, watch-chain, handkerchief, and waistcoat, you had to plunge down after it. But I have no doubt you didn't carry a gun. You're not a sportsman, sir. Clara would not suffer you to be one."

"I own I take no delight in putting God's creatures to death or torture," said Mr. Oscar; "but I must not talk so to some of my landed clients."

"Don't you think, Storker, that there are pursuits more worthy of your attention than mere amusement?" asked Mrs. Oscar incisively.

"Without an atom of doubt," said Storker; "but '*dulce est desipere in loco*.' I intend to

work, but I must have recreation. I should like to go to the Derby or the Oaks now and again, for example."

"Would you not act more wisely and fairly, young man," said Mrs. Oscar, "by sharing the work of the office at home? I think we must wean you from this inclination to what I call frivolous, gauzy pleasures."

"Positively, Mrs. Oscar," said Storker, "I wish I could induce you to try a little frivolous, gauzy pleasure; for you don't know how to enjoy yourself, I fear. Let me suggest that you should accompany me to the Oaks in a neat drag, with plenty of champagne, or to a meet of her Majesty's staghounds at Birkett Paddocks, or to the Spey or the Tweed to fish for salmon and grilse and sip whisky from pocket flasks!"

"Don't you think you talk too much for a lawyer?" said Mrs. Oscar very sourly. "I shouldn't like to trust secrets with a pleasure-

seeker and chatterbox. I would as soon trust them with a young Suffolk joskin at once."

"Storker will be a good boy," said Mrs. Kidd.

"You must not be too stringent with me," said Storker. "I am somewhat touched to sober issues by the bitterness of Mrs. Oscar's tones. I don't wish to be a mere sportsman, or a mere harlequin. But I must have some liberty. I would rather be a rebellious Rocky Mountain buffalo than a Queen's pet cow, that has hardly the trouble of helping herself to food. I must be my own master sometimes!"

"Wise men have said that the pleasure of the wisely governed exceeds that of the ruler," said Mr. Oscar; "or, to unfold this more clearly——"

"I can't quite agree with you, sir," said Storker, "for life seems to me to be little else

than a struggle for mastery. However, once for all, I couldn't sink into a mere office-drudge if you tempted me with a silver mine or a quarry of marble!"

"Be sensible, boy, and look to the main chance," said Admiral Howsegoe. "No one can demand more of you, except a fool. As to renouncing pleasure, it's idiot's talk. You must have some. But there's no pleasure to be had in this place now. We used to come to balls in the town-hall here that were pretty balls—special floors laid down, hot and cold port and sherry negus, and hot and cold lemonade. But that was when my father lived at Wilford Hall. Heathhammock was a loser by his death."

"Ah, ancient worthy!" exclaimed Storker; "you have seen some gay life beside that of Heathhammock balls. You who ate gooseberry tarts for a wager in a 'tuck shop' at fifteen, and literally killed a man at fifty-two

by tempting him to emulate you in consumption of brown brandy."

The Admiral glanced furtively at Mrs. Oscar and smiled grimly at Storker.

"I don't know what the world is coming to," he said. "Even our old Heathhammock music-parties seem to be dying away. There were very few last season."

"It's a great pity," said Mrs. Kidd.

"For my part, I never enjoyed them," said Mrs. Oscar, "and only went to please my daughter. Nor does my husband care for them."

"I suspect that the music interfered with his conversation," said the Admiral; "and conversation is decidedly a nuisance to the music."

"It is fortunate that it never injured any song of yours, sir," retorted Mrs. Oscar abruptly.

"Of his!" said Storker good-humouredly;

"I should sooner expect an anthem from a codfish than a song from the Admiral. In my mother our musical talent is concentrated."

"I have always loved music," said Mrs. Kidd. "I used to enjoy the organ-grinders when I was at school at Brighton, and was quite vexed when one stopped to pick up a penny."

"I have no patience," said Mrs. Oscar, "with your musical enthusiasts—I don't allude to you, Bella—who will chatter about nocturnes, gavottes, and motets, or dash off to the piano when they should ask you to take another muffin."

"George Hern used to sing a good song," said Storker. "I often thought of him when I was in America. I saw a few traces of the awful civil war there, in which he was so eager to take part. He's a good fellow and a brave fellow. How is he?"

"You had better ask Mr. Oscar," said that

gentleman's wife curtly, "he sees more of him than any one. Hern is his pet as he always has been."

Mr. Oscar straightened himself in his chair, and looked at his wife with unusual firmness.

"I have always tried to befriend this poor fellow," he said; "and have never felt ashamed to associate with him to some extent, though, as you know, he is not, to quote Crackenthorpe's phrase on the Church of Rome, 'of so honourable a race' as might be desired."

"I always liked the fellow," said Storker, "and knew he had brains as well as strength and activity, and a lion's heart. I hugely admire a man at once bold and athletic, and am not marrowless or a chicken myself. To confess the truth I've jostled a policeman into the gutter in my time, and once nearly threw a drunken rough down an area!"

"Ah!" said Mrs. Kidd, "it makes me nervous to hear of these things; but, as a boy, you used to break the chairs and furniture, you know."

"George Hern has been wild," said Mr. Oscar; "but he has renounced his feats of strength and daring, I hope. He is on the eve of his last examination, which no doubt he will pass. I maintain," he continued, again looking firmly at his wife, "that he is in all respects fitted to join our profession. He has picked up much information in my study, including a little Latin prose, though he knows nothing of Greek, or of Latin verse."

"I don't think," said Mr. Kidd, "that he would be a better man in the least degree if he had sighed over '*τυπτω*', or been laughed at for thinking '*sub tegmine fagi*' the close of a pentameter line. Give me a practical man."

"He is a faithful and sound clerk," said Mr.

Oscar, "and a most persevering fellow. He is a useful depository of the unrecorded, and directory to the recorded business of my office."

"I'm afraid it will take me some time to transform myself into a walking abstract of your business, sir," said Storker.

"Make use of Hern by copying his perseverance!" said Mrs. Oscar. "Surpass him!"

"I remember once watching him, when he was a little boy, sawing a piece of tough cord into lengths on the edge of a door-scraper," said Mr. Kidd, "and I said then, 'that is a resolute lad.'"

"And I say now," said Admiral Howsegoe, dropping his hand rather heavily on the table, "as I have always thought, that Oscar's great indulgence of young Hern is a mistake, and I believe his wife will bear me out."

"No, sir," said Mrs. Oscar, "you must not appeal to me. In the matter of George Hern I refer you to Mr. Oscar."

"Never mind, Mary Ann," said the Admiral, "I prophesy——"

"Don't prophesy to me, please," she rejoined; "I don't believe in prophecies. There are twenty foolish guesses at the future to one fair judgment of it."

"I say that this Hern has been made too much of," said the Admiral warmly. "I should have thought that his folly in thinking of going suddenly away to enlist as a mercenary among a parcel of Yankees——"

"Don't revile the Americans, grandfather," said Storker. "They're our nearest kinsfolk, and our best, in spite of Lundy Lane and Bunker's Hill."

"Confound it!" said the Admiral. "No one can go far in this hotch-potch, many-sided world without coming to loggerheads with some one: but here I can't sit in my chair without a collision, and that after a dinner which has not agreed with me. I say that

Hern's father is an ambitious jackass, and thinks the boy fit to rule England and its dependencies. Is Suffolk to bring forth another Cardinal Wolsey? Not yet, I think."

"It seems to me," said Mrs. Kidd, "that every one should keep in his place. I've heard the ladies at our Dorcas meetings say as much, and mention Hern."

"Most women are so busy with repetitions of narrow chit-chat," said Storker, "that they can't give much attention to broad wisdom and weighty matters."

"My son is always abusing women," said Mrs. Kidd, from whom as well as his other Heathhammock friends, Storker had kept secret his unsuccessful proposal to Miss Leeke-Strangways; "and yet I shouldn't wonder if we see him alter and become one of the most passionate lovers in the world. Perhaps he'll be like Lawrence Pawley when he couldn't

have Barbara Gostling. He tried to shoot himself in the head and missed his aim, and brought down a mess of plaster from the ceiling ; and then he went to the river to drown himself, but the water was so dreadfully cold he slunk back to his fireside, and ate five stale biscuits, and groaned and moaned—I imagine like my father used to do after trying to smoke cigars."

The Admiral's indignation was increased by this allusion. He made two fierce blows at a piece of cotton on his sleeve, as he said :

" I begin to think that Storker's opinion on women is correct. It's the policy of our law to prevent breaches of the peace—then why, in Heaven's name, is there no definite restriction on a woman's speech ? As to George Hern, he's a smart fellow, but——"

" I propose we cease to talk about him," said Mrs. Oscar. " We may have to consider him one day : but I should think we might

talk over Storker's plans with more profit this evening. Admiral Howsegoe, you would not like to run the risk of being ranked with those gossiping simpletons—there are many in Heathhammock—who seem to take more interest in their neighbours' trivial than in their own serious concerns. Bella, are you ready to go into the drawing-room? You will follow soon, Storker, for I want to hear some more of your American adventures, and so on, you know."

"One word," said Mr. Kidd. "You must give George Hern his due. If he has got on well, possibly he is not without considerable merit. Yet it is by no means the constant custom in Heathhammock (I speak as a practical man) to recognise and reward merit. We will follow you shortly," he added to the ladies as they withdrew—Mrs. Oscar remarking that she had heard enough of Hern.

"I was born in 1800," said Admiral Howsegoe deliberately, "when wheat was a guinea a bushel."

"In the fourteenth century," interposed Mr. Oscar, "you could buy a cow for a shilling, and a good hog for fivepence."

"Upon my life, sir!" thundered the Admiral, glaring at him; "do you jeer at my allusions to the past, as if I were only a bundle of broken-down, decaying memories?"

"Not at all, Admiral," said Mr. Oscar suavely; "I beg your pardon for interrupting you. It is natural that you should like to recall the pleasant experiences of the past, to look back on your dropt flowers, as it were, like 'the woman commonly called Proserpine,' as Tacitus has it."

"I was born, sir, I say in 1800," resumed the Admiral sternly; "and to-day, and not for the first time of late, my opinion has been

disregarded and my words have been slighted in this house. Such being the case, let those I would help help themselves. That's all I've got to say. Pass the port, young mister."

"Grandfather," said Storker cheerfully, and with no sign of alarm, for similar outbreaks were not uncommon, "I drink health and long life to you. You must overlook our shortcomings. You will never be treated with intentional disrespect in Castle House!"

CHAPTER V.

GEORGE HERN was the natural child of the gay, impetuous, pretty young maiden, Lily Hern, of Heathhammock, by George Boulder of the same place—though, at times, it would have been hard to name the "domicile of choice" of this restless wanderer.

Boulder was a brave and generous, but violent and hard-drinking seaman, who certainly could not boast a stainless character. He had been a smuggler—had, indeed, been termed "a tetrarch of the Suffolk smugglers"—and had been in some way implicated in certain slave-trade transactions with Arabs in the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf.

Moreover, in an evil hour, one night, while under the goad of hunger and very gloomy prospects, he made an absurd and desperate effort to break into a private bank within the curtilage of a dwelling-house in Liverpool, wounded two constables in his struggles to get free from them, and was condemned to penal servitude. He was also sentenced to undergo a second term of confinement for attempting, during the first, to escape by scaling the walls of the penitentiary.

As to the Herns, Mr. Oscar Ashbocking has said that for two generations they were as intractable as any wild race described by Diodorus. The member of the family who appeared to have acted least in opposition to the rules of civilisation was one Susan Hern, who married the unromantic Mr. Richard Figgs, a hatter of Raddiston; but even she was said to have degenerated, and to have perverted her husband from a passable fellow

to a pot-house merry-maker; until, missing his way one snowy night, he slept in a ditch—a humble bed, but an expensive one, for he paid his life for it.

Hiram Hern, Lily's grandfather, was discharged from the navy and narrowly escaped a whipping. Reuben Hern, her uncle, was mixed up with a fowl-stealing adventure, and distinguished himself by a long swim in the Samphire Creek to elude Policeman Peacock and two special constables; and William Hern, her father, was rude, surly, and self-willed enough to illustrate the worst traditions of the family. When Boulder fell in love with Lily, she and her father, who was a widower, were the sole survivors of the Herns, though they were once plentiful on the eastern coast.

There was a great contrast in the ages of the lovers, Boulder being the elder by many years. His stirring and unsettled mode of life had turned his attention from deliberate

thoughts of marriage before, though he was a lonely man, knowing no kinsfolk, for he had himself been born out of wedlock, on the coast of Norfolk, of humble parents, and making few friends. The girl, however, was heart-free, and returned his passionate affection. He was not a lover to be easily rejected, having much of the energy of youth, a noble frame and a manly countenance; and an air of romance was thrown around him by his well-known courage and the many tales of his strange adventures. As to the stains upon his name, perhaps poor Lily vindicated them by the woman's argument that her family had left as many on her own.

But there was a frowning and inexorable obstacle to their union in Lily's father, who cherished in his stubborn heart an old hatred against Boulder, having been twice publicly threatened and insulted, and once pulled by the nose and thrown down by him, and this

last in the presence of the lifeboat crew. He rejected all Boulder's offers of reconciliation, savagely forbade the marriage—Lily was but nineteen—and called down the curse of Heaven upon the love of his daughter for his enemy.

I will not dwell upon the sinful, sorrowful tale of stealthy meetings, passion and frailty. During Boulder's absence from Heathhammock in a fishing-fleet, which was detained by storms far away in the North Sea, it became clear that Lily would shortly have a child. Heart-crushed and bewildered by her father's cruel taunts, she left her home a little before her confinement; and her baby was born in the workhouse of Straybirds Hundred. Four days afterwards, the mother was laid in her grave; and Boulder returning when the child was a fortnight old, rented a humble home, oddly and from ancient times called Oblivion Cottage, in

Honey-pot Lane, near the North Cliff, took the little fellow thither, and called him by his own name "George."

After his daughter's death William Hern, to distract his troubled mind and remove himself from the temptation to do violent revenge on Boulder, went on a voyage to Melbourne. He returned in safety, but, during a subsequent voyage to Hudson, was drowned off the Dogger Bank.

Enlisting the occasional help of friendly females—though, as his neighbour, Mrs. Josham, said, he could lay a fire, cook, clean plates, and wash linen, as well as a woman—Boulder devoted himself with a good will that ripened wondrously to the little life left in his charge, the pledge of a passion which had stirred his heart profoundly, and would haunt it to the end, the poor, innocent offspring of that passion's lawless intensity and dishonourable indulgence. The rough and

fierce man's tenderness to the child was very strange to witness. The good impulses of his warm heart found encouragement and satisfaction in his fatherly duties; and, in spite of the novelty of these, and the little but grave cares they entailed upon him, the happiest moments he had ever spent were passed in nursing his son, answering the many questions he soon began to propound, and planning and striving to supply his daily wants.

And the child became a still more potent blessing to the man as its human soul developed and called for guidance hour by hour. He meditated faithfully on his responsibilities, and asked the help of worthy men; and the inborn virtue of the rude seaman, suppressed by inauspicious training and experiences, gradually assumed a certain sway. His soul, by slow degrees refreshed and purified and made impressible to good

by his love and conscientious duty-seeking, could judge truly, and reject many of the evil influences which had ruled him in the past. Solemnly and sincerely he resolved to guide the child aright, according to his lights, and to carve out for it, if he could, a good place in the world. He, therefore, not without backslidings, renounced his dissipated habits, ceased his wanderings, settled as a beach-man at Heathhammock, lived peaceably, worked hard, saved money, generally planned his fishing excursions so as to be ashore on Sunday, and went to church.

The disgrace of having been a convict made him liable, of course, to a sneer from others at times; but his old reputation as a man of terror kept in check the insults of all in their sober senses. Besides his tenderness to his little child, and his manly amendment of life, could not fail to win respect among

his mates of the beach, a not ungenerous class. I admit, on the other hand, that some envy was excited by his success ; for his physical power, and good seamanship placed him soon among the first of the along-shore fishermen, and he was appointed cockswain of the lifeboat.

The child was not unworthy of his devoted guardian, nor of Mrs. Josham's description of him as "a noble boy to be born in wickedness and the workhouse." He inherited traits of his mother's comeliness of face and of his father's activity and lusty strength of frame ; and gave signs of a useful intellect, a bold and generous heart, and a strange, instinctive delicacy of feeling, notwithstanding a certain eager, resolute vigour which displayed itself in every action.

He soon became a pet among the seafarers who, with their romantic tales, fostered within the bold, bright-faced little fellow

vague hopes of a life of travel and adventure. He loved to roam away to the cliff-edge, and seat himself beside a string of old salt-water gossips, listening to their strange experiences, or to the grand and solemn songs of the sea, which they told him had in its awful hunger, swallowed so many they had known and fraternised with, and which had washed back to the earth they left alive so many bodies, to be put away from sight of the sun and of their brothers.

But his father discouraged these interviews, for it was his fixed desire that his son should never be a seaman ; and he feared, tracing much of his own character in the lad, that, even at that early age, he might be fatally prejudiced against a settled life on the land. Few could unfold a more stirring history than he, but he kept it secret from his son.

But his pride in the boy would not suffer him to be content with the prospect of a poor

and humble walk ashore for him. He maintained that he had something of "a Natur's gentleman" about him, and should have his due. Therefore, though at the advice of wise counsellors, he sent him early to the Infant, and afterwards to the National, School, he was jealous of his mixing intimately with the lower sort of his classmates, and constantly and earnestly encouraged the lad's intuitive dislike of the unlovely and degrading, though perhaps wit-sharpening, influences of "street-life," and his abhorrence of dirt, frowziness, dissipation, gross coarseness of speech, and brutality of manner.

Owing, chiefly, to the steadfast promptings and instigations of his father (for he heartily disliked the confinement of the schoolroom) young George made fair, but not remarkable, progress with his studies. He mastered the primary art of reading with unusual rapidity,

however, being incited thereto by his impatience to enjoy the contents of the two old volumes of Kelly's "History of the Wars of the Revolution," which lay underneath the brown Bible at home. But he was deprived of this particular reward, for Boulder, discountenancing a soldier's lot for him, took alarm at these signs of a military taste, the more so, as he had about this time to drag him by force out of a fair peep-show, where the Crimean battles were depicted. So he exchanged the volumes of Kelly with Mr. Checketts, the stationer, who had dealings in old books, for Maturin's "Sermons" and Johnson's "Lives of the Poets."

In play-time, George Hern, who was certainly not without ambition, showed to more conspicuous advantage; and few could cope with him either in daring or bodily power. He could be encouraged or taunted to reckless acts, such as the leaping down from great

heights, and springing about the branches of trees. When roused, he would fight as resolutely as a quail; but he would submit, with a smile, to a hard knock or fall fairly given. At thirteen, he was a young hero in the cricket-field and on the horizontal-bar; had won four prizes in field sports and five in boys' swimming matches. Bathing was his especial delight, and he was an unrivalled diver, seeming almost as much at his ease on the waves as a sea-gull.

There were two branches of physical exercise, however, from which, to his regret, he was debarred: boating and riding. His father, from the first, persistently dissuaded him from going to sea with him, and forbade his entering a boat in his absence. And he had no opportunity of practising horsemanship, which he would have enjoyed as heartily as any Tartar that ever smacked his lips over wild honey or arrack. In his dreams, how-

ever—for this personage of resolute deed by day was a great dreamer by night—he often enjoyed the triumphs of a Hiero, riding visionary flat-races or steeple-chases, and generally on some wondrous steed, which, though from its vicious propensities, it had to start in the rear of the other competitors, yet always passed the winning-post first! In sober fact, however, he had mounted nothing nobler than the donkeys on Heathhammock Common.

One afternoon, when he was in his thirteenth year, a Prussian vessel, wanting ballast, put into Heathhammock Harbour, whose yellow waters met the sea between two dusky old piers about four furlongs southward from the town; and, at the close of his school-hours, he walked with his father to look at this foreign craft. After the survey, some severe criticism from Boulder, and a few disparaging allusions to the evils and miseries of a seaman's career, the father crossed the ferry at

the request of a fisherman on the other side, and walked with him to the neighbouring village of Southaston to help to settle some dispute between two harbour-pilots there. As it was probable that he would not reach home till the middle of the evening, he sent his son back to the cottage, with injunctions to call in the aid of Mrs. Josham in the matter of tea, and to prepare his lessons as usual for the morrow.

On this same afternoon Storker Ashbocking, then about fifteen, and Clara, some four years younger, accompanied by a small cream and white fox-terrier belonging to the former, strolled, as they often did, along the beach to the harbour-mouth, and returned some two hundred yards in front of George Hern.

As they neared the lifeboat-house, which stood about midway between the harbour and Battery Green, they met a man and two youths, part of the crew of the Prussian

vessel, who had drunk too many pots of potent liquor in the town, and were in a rude and lawless humour, encouraged by the knowledge that their ship would put to sea very soon after they reached her. The youngest of these rovers, a great hulking fellow of seventeen or more, threw a stone at Storker's dog, and, on his remonstrating with unmistakable indignation, knocked the hat of the banker's son some three yards from his head. In the heat of the moment the young Englishman, as became the martial ancestry of his mother—though he was himself, perhaps, inclined rather to words than deeds in warfare, —advanced threateningly, and, to the terror of Clara, was met halfway and pummelled soundly. The prospect was gloomy enough, for, whereas the terrier assisted his master with tongue-service only, the Prussian's superior age and strength were abetted by one or two contributory blows from his elder com-

panion, while the other, with a very ugly grin, advanced upon Clara. Suddenly an English ally dashed to the rescue, like a small lion, in the person of George Hern.

Striking Clara's assailant on the side of the head twice in quick succession, with all the force of his vigorous and well-exercised arms, he tripped him up as he staggered, and in a moment was at Storker's side, with flashing eyes, and shouting words of encouragement to him and defiance to his foes.

But Storker had been so severely punished, and was so vividly impressed with the superiority of his opponents, that, immediately their attention was diverted from him by the onslaught of Hern, he took to his heels, followed by his dog, and bellowed out, through a pair of bruised and swollen lips, that he would bring the "infernal, blackguardly, brutal, cowardly beggars to justice, the cat-o'-nine tails, and the gallows before they were

an hour older." So Hern was left to face the fearfully-superior force alone.

Clara instinctively followed her friend for a few paces, but suddenly she stopped, turned, looked around her for some visible living help, but in vain; and then, with firm pale face, went back towards the combatants, bravely resolved to make some effort, however perilous, to stop the struggle.

With true British pluck, but very doubtful wisdom, George Hern strove to hold his ground. He received several very hard blows and was twice thrown violently to the ground. But after each fall he scrambled up instantly, and cleaning his bloody face, resumed his defence with a sort of frenzied energy, but not without some system. After hurling him down a third time, and just as poor Clara was pausing in bewilderment on the skirts of the fray, one of the Prussians discovered some fishermen on the beach near Battery Green,

and the three hurried off towards the harbour, from which their vessel sailed before Storker's threatened retribution could reach them.

The disfigured national-school boy never forgot the pale, excited, but sweetly compassionate young face that looked upon him as he gathered himself up after his last downfall, and glared, not without a feeling of relief, at his retreating enemies. This and her words of praise and gratitude often warmed his heart in his dreams afterwards, when the scene was re-performed with many variations and additions. And, from that day, he never passed Miss Clara Ashbocking without straightening himself, and acknowledging in his best manner her kindly salutations.

Clara Ashbocking was too outspoken to be considered a "model character" by many of the ladies of Heathhammock, but she was, even at this time, the practical helper, as far

as she could be, of those in real need of help with whom she came in contact. Her favourite doll had been a poor mutilated one-eyed lady; and very bitter tears did she let fall upon a lame lost dog which her mother refused to let her keep. She had contributed earnest and effective words to certain arguments, which ended in Bayard Swindell, the reformed "betting and fighting man," being appointed gardener to Mr. Kidd Ashbocking and her father; in Bilge, the poacher of the past, becoming butler at Castle House; and in the ancient and ailing Swidger and the half-witted Trippington continuing in the service of her mother, in spite of their infirmities; and she had many admirers among the poor.

The shadow upon George Hern's birth, had it come prominently to her notice, might have led Clara to take an interest in him before; and, now that her sympathies were

drawn to him and his history, through the strange medium of his pugilistic chivalry, she mentioned him to her father as one worthy of his help should opportunity offer. Mr. Oscar, however, confined his present patronage to a gift of a new florin and a copy of "The Guide to Knowledge."

But a short time afterwards, meeting Boulder in the Sailors' Reading-room, he spoke to him of his son, and heard from him so warmly-worded and flattering a description of the youth, that he urged the seaman by all means to carry out a notion he hinted at of placing him for a time with Mr. Service, at Cambridge Academy. And from that period Mr. Oscar occasionally made inquiries about him.

And he did not pass from Clara's notice. It was remarkable how often she heard of him. She made discovery that Mrs. Olabar, the family laundress, was quite intimate with

Mrs. Josham, and had much to say about young Hern, whom she eulogised as "quite the little gentleman, in regards of some things and considerin' all, though as to the wearin' holes in his socks, why he'd wear holes in hoss-shoes!" She also found that Trippington often sat next in the choir to, and took a Sunday stroll with, Polly Folkard, the national schoolmaster's maid-of-all-work, and had gathered from her several items of news concerning Boulder's son. Swindell, too, it seemed, knew Boulder well, but spoke of him as "a wunnerful bold un, but a bad un," for in his "fighting days," Swindell feared only Boulder and one Joshua Bedingfield in all Heathhammock and its neighbourhood.

Clara grew rather friendly with Alice Service, who was one of her young fellow-teachers at the Sunday-school, and took some interest in her gossip about her father's pupils. Alice assured her that there was no such

cricketer and football-player in the school as poor George Hern, whom her father pitied so much. And really, Alice said, he was quite well-behaved, and was always so very clean, and no wonder, for they said he was a splendid swimmer, and very fond of bathing. And as to the horizontal-bar in the play-ground, he was like a monkey on it, and he was the best singer in the singing-class which practised in the schoolroom every day before dinner.

Clara was further informed how her young hero, in a shadow-work performance among the pupils of Mr. Service, had acted with such success that he was selected, at the annual dramatic entertainment on the Queen's birthday, to play the part of the heroic Hereward in "The Sea-king's Vow." And also how Mr. Service had taken a decided interest in him and proposed to compliment him, when he lectured on Eastern

manners and customs at the town-hall in the following month, by placing him on the platform to exhibit certain illustrative costumes which had been lent to him: "For," said Mr. Service, "the boy's good bearing will more than compensate for his Saxon complexion!"

And George Hern was not unconscious that Miss Ashbocking took a little interest in him, and the knowledge gratified and encouraged him.

CHAPTER VI.

CAMBRIDGE ACADEMY was not a "high-class" school. It was decidedly too "low-class," by some degrees, for Mrs. Kidd Ashbocking's son, who was prepared for Rugby by the private tuition of the late curate, Mr. Tink, and his successor, Mr. Peters. Mr. Service, however, was a man of nerve, enterprise, and much common sense, and, though a gossip versed in social vanities might point out peculiar distinctions of grade among the parents of his pupils, his school was well-filled and successfully conducted.

George Hern derived unquestionable benefit there, and, for the most part, was happy.

His unfortunate birth did not wholly escape taunts, but he, in his sphere, could inspire deterrent fear almost as effectually as his father could in his. His schoolfellows were very speedily led to believe the tale of his determined conflict with the Prussian sailors. Besides, his generosity and other good qualities, his pleasant face, and his schoolmaster's favour were further safeguards against much mockery.

One day, when George was fifteen, Mr. Service was asked by Mr. Oscar Ashbocking, in the course of a conversation, embracing such subjects as Jacob Boehm, blood-bats, Sale's translation of the Koran, the noble instincts of the elephant, and St. Gregory's "Funeral oration on Cæsarius," as to the progress the lad had made, and as to his promise for the future. Mr. Service reported favourably on the former point, and, as to the latter, he said that, believing from remarks

made by his daughter Alice, that Hern had a friend in Mr. Ashbocking, he had for some time intended to ask that gentleman to make room for him in his office. He added, that he had discussed the matter with Boulder, who agreed with him that a comfortable place under so considerate an employer as the worthy town-clerk, might induce the youth, then at a critical age, to settle down ashore "at once and for all."

Mr. Ashbocking, relieved to find that the application was not for a cash donation, and impelled at that moment to quote a peculiar passage from a translation of Sádi of Gulistan, promised to think over the matter. The issue was the appointment of George Hern as his junior clerk, to the great gratification of Boulder, at whose bidding George accepted the post without hesitation, and also to that of Miss Clara Ashbocking, when she read the news at Kensington in a letter from her father.

The duties of his new sphere, accompanied as they were with the loss of his playground amusements, and of the company of his many schoolfellows, were rather uncongenial to George Hern at first. Indeed, Mr. Creaks, a clerk of long standing in the office, told Mr. Ashbocking, with a shake of his rather weak-brained head, that he feared he would be of "no manner of use."

"The lad's a smart lad enough, sir," he said, "and can balance a ruler and buck over a table, and lift a good weight; but, not that I wish to say anything against him, his heart isn't in the orfice work."

"I am sorry to hear it," said Mr. Ashbocking; "but we must give him a fair chance. Perhaps," he added with a smile, "you may find his athletic qualities of value in collecting debts, or rents, or serving process, where threats or even physical annoyance might be expected."

But George Hern strove hard and hopefully, at times, not only to give satisfaction in the office, but also to interest himself warmly in his work; for he would rather have faced much more unpleasant tasks than have disappointed his father. Therefore, the prophetic foreboding of Mr. Creaks was a little premature, as George soon proved himself of some use; for his energy, while he was under the dominion of his good resolutions, enabled him to perform even uncongenial duties with tolerable success.

Boulder's close and anxious observation of his son, however, soon led him to think that he was not quite happy, and one evening, after gazing at him with an air of mystery, he said, in grave tones:

"Don't give way, but stand to your post! I've a word to say, which I didn't think to say so soon. The schoolmaster has made inquiries for me, and it's led to this. If I can fish

up eighty pound for stamp, and get Mr. Ashbocking to take a matter o' some hunderd an' a little odd more, by easy payments over five year, for premium, I can make a lawyer of you out-and-out, an' no clerk. And," he added, striking his large hand on the table, so that the glass of the paraffin lamp rattled and rang, "I mean to do it! With them articles you're a man! They're compass, sextan', an' chart to you, and you'll go ahid fair to be a gentleman. I hevn't slaved and saved iver since you was a babe for nothin', an' found you in good eddication into the bargain, and I'll make a gentleman of you if I'm spared. You've bin a good lad, though I've sometimes had to bring you to pretty sharp; ay, and, with them spirits of yours, I've had to threaten you a time or two with a taste of the colt. But a kind word 'ud allays do more with you than half a yard o' two-inch rope, and so God bless you!"

Of course George's prospects were brightened by this pregnant statement. His efforts at the office were marked the next day and afterwards by more deliberate perseverance than before; and Mr. Ashbocking, in a few weeks, informed Boulder that he thought well of his new clerk. But that proud father, acting under the advice of Mr. Service, though much against his own wish, deferred his proposition as to articles in order that his son might undergo a thoroughly fair trial. But the issue of this prolonged test was not satisfactory.

Shortly after Mr. Ashbocking's interview with Boulder, Storker Ashbocking came home from Rugby for his Christmas holiday, and, during its third week, two of his schoolfellows arrived to stay with him at Castle House. These visitors were high-spirited and fond of mischief, and their humours were not resisted by Storker. Strange freaks disturbed the peace

of Heathhammock, such as the hanging of a rug overnight outside the window of Admiral Howsegoe's bedroom, the removal of the board of Corporate Bye-laws from its post on the cliff to the town pump, from which it was suspended topsy-turvy, the shooting of peas from catapults at the lighted windows of the church during evening service, and the ringing of the bells of crusty householders at unseasonable hours.

A temporary football club was instituted by Storker and his friends, and the valuable help of George as a player was secured in two matches, each of which took place on a Saturday afternoon, the office being regularly closed at noon on that day. Storker had always shown young Hern a rather patronising friendship since the encounter by the lifeboat house, and having narrated to and merrily discussed with him, on the football ground, some of the recent adventures of himself and his visitors, he

asked his co-operation in a bold deed they meditated, viz., the firing of one of the old guns on Battery Green at midnight.

He could not resist the temptation of this new and exciting adventure, and one night, when Boulder was at sea, fishing, the gun was fired. The unprecedented rashness of the proceeding—for the old cannon was honeycombed with rust—led Clara Ashbocking, with strange penetration, to suspect that Hern had taken part in it. She questioned him, and he confessed the truth, as he had already done to his father, from whom he kept nothing secret. To both he expressed penitence; but he was prejudicially unsettled.

Fortunately Storker's relationship to the town-clerk saved him and his coadjutors from any worse punishment than some bitter verbal criticism. But, after the departure of the Rugbeians with their merriment and of Clara with her calm and friendly smile, George

Hern, the persevering and exemplary clerk, seemed to be threatened with a reaction. Boulder was busy, and seldom ashore just then, or his son's state of mind would have been detected, and some remedy tried.

One afternoon, at this time, as the clerks were preparing to leave the office, a dispute arose among some of them as to the possibility of walking to Raddiston Pump and back in four hours. George Hern offered to solve the question by performing the feat with some minutes to spare; but he was told that his interference was not agreeable, and that it was well known that he could do what no other human being would aspire to, even to the insinuating of himself into the good graces of his betters. Some warm expressions followed, and, for the first time since his entry into the office, a stinging allusion was made to his illegitimacy by Bedingfield, an engrossing clerk about five years his

senior. In an instant Hern challenged him to fight, but the others interposed and persuaded Bedingfield to withdraw his unkind words.

The hardy and industrious Boulder was at sea that night, and George spent it restlessly, though Mrs. Josham, noticing traces of a disturbed mind in his manners, had prevailed upon him to take some mild medicine of hers and to go to bed early. He was haunted by a perverse idea, strengthened and seconded by his inclination for the exercise, that his honour was in question until he had made good his boast in the matter of the walk to Raddiston and back; and, after breakfast on the following morning, he marched off, in wet, windy, miserable weather, to prove his words, recklessly passing the office on his way.

He covered the distance in due time and vindicated his assertion. But when he reached the bridge over Samphire Creek he

turned and retraced his steps. Arguing that he might as well play the fool all day, especially as the rain had now ceased, he went back to Raddiston to see a body of dragoons pass through the town, on their way to the barracks at Norwich.

Boulder returned to Oblivion Cottage at dusk. He was surprised to learn from Mrs. Josham that George had not been there at dinner-time, and alarmed to hear, on applying at the town-clerk's office, that no one there had seen him that day. He hastened into the street, making excited inquiries of the passers-by, but to no effect. He then strode into the nearest public-house—the "Barge"—demanding in his energetic way if any one there could give him tidings of his son.

There were several fishermen in the tap-room, among them Joshua Bedingfield, the father of the clerk of that name who had insulted George Hern, a big fellow reputed

to be the strongest man in Heathhammock. He was not friendly with Boulder, being envious of his greater success as a fisherman, and of the favour shown him by the Lifeboat Committee, in appointing him cockswain of the crew. Moreover the two men had quarrelled more than once in past times, when Boulder was not sparing with bitter and defiant words. This huge Bedingfield, emboldened by much gin and beer, and by the presence of several of his clique, availed himself of this good chance of jeering at Boulder. He suggested that it was too much to think that all Heathhammock kept their eyes on his brat; that, for aught he cared, he was gone to sea, though Boulder did not think the sea good enough for him; and that very likely he would be drowned, for folks could not forget that the curse of William Hern was on him, and William Hern was as good a man as Boulder any day in the week.

Boulder was in no humour to waste words, so he simply gave the other a hearty curse, and repeated his question as to his son.

Upon this Bedingfield, further encouraged by Boulder's moderate retaliation, resumed that it was thought by a good many on Heath-hammock beach that the lifeboat cockswain was too proud and uppish, considering that he had been inside four walls which most folks liked to look at from the outside best; that his own son, he heard, had taken George Hern down a peg or two the day before, and that he himself would put the father under the table for a fourpenny-piece, though he thought himself mighty good with his fists.

Boulder mastered his passion even at this trying moment, and turned towards the door without speaking, so strong were the new habits engendered in this once intemperate man; but Bedingfield, amid a general titter, followed him, and tipped his hat over his

eyes. Then the two men met face to face and fought; and, before any one could intervene, Boulder, with a furious vigour that amazed and terrified every beholder, struck down his ponderous opponent with a blow on the temple—and they lifted up a corpse.

A very bitter close had George Hern's holiday! He saw his father in the police-cell after he returned from Raddiston; but the poor seaman seemed speechless with horror and remorse, and gazed at his son with a ghastly face that appalled him.

Tortured with self-reproach, for he felt that he was the sole cause of this new calamity, George threw himself upon his father's neck, and reviled himself in the bitterest terms; but Boulder, staring wildly, only stroked his head in silence, until the policeman called the boy away. Then the father grasped his hands, and said in deep, sad tones: "No matter how it came, no

matter now. It's come, and all's lost. God must take care of you!" With this he burst into tears, and turned away to hide his face.

With his father's misery weighing on his heart and conscience, George could not go to bed that night—could not even approach the cottage—but, tired as he was, went wandering about the common in the darkness, till, overcome with fatigue, at last, he stretched himself upon the wet grass to rest.

Before the dawn of the next day a violent shivering-fit drove him to the bed he dreaded to face before. Fever followed—a time of fearful visions and despairing thoughts—and, with returning health, came the knowledge that his father was far away.

For Boulder was tried for manslaughter and found guilty; and, the truth being somewhat perverted to his prejudice by the witnesses of the fight, all friends of the dead man, and the prisoner's prior convictions for

burglary (attended with violence), and for attempted prison-breaking, being brought to the notice of the court, he was sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

The kindly Mr. Oscar Ashbocking (deducting a small commission for his services) arranged with the proper authorities for the remission of the penalty of forfeiture; took charge of Boulder's boat, fishing-gear, furniture, and other goods; placed, as requested, in George's money-box a few pounds from the bag of gold in the padlocked chest, and added the rest of the contents to the poor fisherman's steadily-augmented deposit-fund at Mr. Kidd Ashbocking's bank. He also secured a transferee of Oblivion Cottage, to the satisfaction of the landlord, and secured lodgings for George with his gardener, Bayard Swindell, at Sunrise Lodge.

Boulder did not mention to Mr. Ashbocking his fond idea of procuring articles for his son.

Poor fellow, his "easy payments over five year" were too deeply shrouded in uncertainty! He said, however, that he hoped the town-clerk would permit the lad to stay in his office, and would watch over him a little. Mr. Ashbocking communicated these words to George Hern, and offered to readmit him to his service, only visiting with a short exhortation the irregular and fatal excursion to Raddiston.

The father's wish sufficed to outweigh the son's eager desire to escape from Heathhammock altogether; so, with a gloomy and dogged diligence, he resumed his duties.

But another interruption was near at hand. The systematic hatred and studied contempt which marked the conduct of young Bedingfield towards him, borne by him for some days with conscientious patience, roused his anger one afternoon, and a tumult occurred in the office. George Hern struck the first

blow; and, after much consideration and consultation with the other clerks, Mr. Ashbocking regretfully gave him notice to leave.

On the following day, in the course of a long, rambling walk, George found himself at the busy seaport of Herringmouth, about fourteen miles from Heathhammock, and refreshed himself with ale and bread-and-cheese in an inn on the quay, called "The Fisherman's Return." In the room with him were some of the crew of a vessel which was to start for New York the next day; and these were listening to one of their passengers, a knowing American, who talked oracularly of the imminent outbreak of civil war in the States, and of the possible emancipation of the slaves.

George heard his words with interest, and the thought flashed upon him that it would be a glorious thing to fight for the Federals,

if they espoused the cause of the slaves. Miss Clara Ashbocking would applaud that step. And, forthwith, the bold and silly fellow was seized with a burning wish to take ship to America (how exhilarating the thought of the long voyage!); to cover himself with honour as a young cavalry soldier, if possible—as a drummer-boy, if nothing better offered; and to return to England in time to welcome his father on his release.

He marched back to Heathhammock inspirited with vague visions and filled with martial ardour, and dreamt, that night, that Clara praised and encouraged his Quixotic enterprise, and that his father fingered his medals with a smile of pride. In the morning, after a hasty breakfast, he made a bundle of his few valuable chattels, wrote an explanatory letter to Mr. Ashbocking, emptied his money-box, settled his lodging accounts with Mrs. Swindell, stating that it

was doubtful whether he should return to her house, and was in the act of sallying from the door, to walk to Herringmouth and make a bargain for a passage to New York, in company with the voluble American, when he confronted Clara Ashbocking.

"I came home, yesterday," she said hurriedly, "and heard all; and it's a horrid shame, and I'll stand on your side against all the clerks, for you'll prove yourself better than any of them. Oh, I have been so sorry for you, George Hern, your poor father——"

She paused, and George said warmly, "You are very kind and good."

"Trippington saw you last night, when she went up the street on an errand," Clara continued, assuming the firm, practical tone with which she usually spoke. "She said you looked worn-out, as if you had been wandering about. I guessed you were in a wandering humour, and would be roaming far away

to-day ; so I have come early to see you, and help you if I can."

I need hardly say that my hero's military projects met with prudent discouragement, to his bitter regret. His bright young face was never seen amongst the camps and trenches of America !

But often, as he lay on his web-girt bed at Sunrise Lodge, he took that voyage over the wide sea, and was now a mounted soldier in the army of the Potomac, and now a drummer, sounding his *réveille* and roll-call, and the terrific roll and rataplan among strange scenes and direful carnage. He was in the thick of the fray at Williamsburg and Fair Oaks, at Glendale, Melvern Hill, and Bull's Run. He played a desperate part in the awful fight of Fredericksburg, in the struggles at the Rappahannock River, in the hand-to-hand conflict at Chancellorsville, in the battle of Gettysburg, and in the three days' repulse of

General Lee succeeding that. He received, with burning cheeks, very thrilling compliments from Burnside, Hooker and Meade for his undaunted bravery in the field, and for his humane activity in helping the wounded after the engagements. Moreover, he was wounded many times himself, as were the gallant horses he bestrode, when he served with cavalry. And when he was a drummer of foot his drum was shattered more than once, as he dashed onwards in the forefront of the charging troops.

Ah, the pity of it, that he had to awaken from these stirring unrealities, in sadness of heart, and with not so much as a regimental button for a trophy from his nightly battle-fields!

CHAPTER VII.

CLARA ASHBOCKING at once and with characteristic energy carried into effect her promise to befriend George Hern; and, within twenty-eight hours after the interview in which it was made, he was seated on his old stool at the office. Fortunately for his peace of mind, young Bedingfield soon afterwards accepted a situation in London, procured for him by Mr. Ashbocking, and, with his mother and sisters, left Heathhammock.

My hero found encouragement to sober work more effectual than that he had received from his father's earnest words, in his own desire to justify Mr. Ashbocking in

sending a good report of him to that father through the officials who had him in charge (for Boulder could neither read nor write himself), in Miss Ashbocking's few words, but many friendly smiles, during her holiday, and afterwards in his recollection of these, and in his hope of their recurrence, with a little merited praise. He became more reconciled to his desk, found solace for his saddened feelings in the regular routine of his tasks, and even a kind of pleasure in fearlessly confronting their most unpleasant features. The result was that he made decided progress.

This even Mr. Creaks acknowledged when he told his employer that a new junior clerk was wanted. Mr. Ashbocking was gratified with Hern's bearing, and was especially pleased to find that he availed himself of his permission to take home law-books to read in his leisure hours. For the

sake of his daughter, who had taken some pains with this young man, he wished him to succeed.

As no clerk in the office could write shorthand, Mr. Ashbocking one day advised Hern, as one who seemed seriously inclined to improve himself, to learn the art ; and, on his agreeing to do so, bought him a manual and reading-book, regarding the outlay as a good investment. Hern grappled with the books, and sent his exercises to members of the Phonographic Alliance, who, as was their custom, corrected them gratuitously.

After a patient course of practice, he was satisfactorily tested by Mr. Ashbocking, who, from that time, dictated letters and important documents to him for an hour or two daily in his private office. Moreover, he summoned him one evening to his study, and asked him to take down some passages from L'Estrange's "Abstract of Seneca," which

George transcribed accurately before he left the room. Thus commenced a course of evening studies, which continued, with few intermissions afterwards, to the enrichment of this young man's mental property, and to his advancement in his employer's favour.

I pass to two interviews that should be recorded.

One evening, about twelve months after Boulder's departure, when Mr. Ashbocking and Hern were, as usual, in the study together, the former suddenly laid aside his copy of the great single work of Eunapius, from which he had been dictating translated extracts, and said :

"I have heard from my daughter the statement you made to her, not long ago, as to your father's idea of some day getting articles for you. Perhaps you hardly ex-

pected she would mention this to me. Well, I have thought a little about the matter; and, though there is a prejudice against salaried clerks being admitted to the profession (and one must deal cautiously with prejudices), and, though there are other difficulties in the case, I am unwilling to withhold encouragement from you entirely. I confess that your progress in the office has pleased me, as has your character; and your help to me in this room has not been without value."

A smile of pleasure beamed upon the listener's face.

"I seldom indulged myself with long-hand note-taking before," continued Mr. Ashbocking; "my fingers had exercise enough during the day. I have therefore relished the more my opportunities, through your means, of extracting for classification and other purposes, as copiously as I could wish, at every

sitting. Besides, my daughter tells me that I ought to have appreciated your constant presence as a patient listener to my harangues. She thinks they may have been a little trying to you sometimes."

"They refreshed me, sir," said George, with another smile on his frank face. "While you spoke, I could rest my hand and eyes, and lean back in this comfortable chair."

"True. I hope, too, my words have taught you something worth retaining, ere this. To resume, I will tell you that I think it just possible, if all goes well with poor Boulder after his return, that we may carry out the articles some day. Therefore, I propose that you should keep this in mind, and gradually prepare yourself for the preliminary examination. In this matter I am not opposed by Mrs. Ashbocking. She appreciates your gratuitous services in this

room, and admires your diligence, in which you set, I grant, a good example to the other clerks. Besides, she would be glad to gratify, in any prudent manner, our daughter, who, in her kind-hearted way, has more than once acted as your advocate and friend."

"I wish I might prove myself more worthy of her kindness to me," said George Hern, warmly. "Pardon my boldness, if I say she has been a sort of anchor to me. I thank you, sir, for the suggestion you have just made as to the articles. I will try not to disgrace them, if I ever get them."

"Well, 'Mr. Secretary,' as my daughter sometimes calls you, you must continue to work hard: you must think and reason; you must examine into the principles and essential virtues of the law-works you study."

"I will try, sir," said George Hern, firmly; "and will serve you faithfully, too."

"Faithful servants are not very plentiful, I fear, though neither Richelieu nor Robespierre were without them, I believe. I think you will give me satisfaction in this particular, as heretofore. I think you may be trusted to deal honestly, speak the truth, and act in my absence as you would before my face."

"I hope so, sir, in important things," said Hern. "Not but what I've played the fool in your absence in this very room," he added, with a little hesitation.

"Ah, in what way?"

"Whistling, sir, and humming tunes, tapping on the table and marking it with my pencil, falling into a doze, balancing books in queer positions, and trying jugglery experiments with the old empty fish-globe, and other things; and once, sir (to tell the truth and shame the Devil), when I had to get down all the bound pamphlets from those high shelves, to find the letters on tythe-commuta-

tion, I tied two stools to my feet, and stumped about in stilt-fashion."

"Anyhow, your secret actions are not destined, it seems, to long concealment; and as to your confessed and detected misdoings, they are not very grave or numerous, though I once had to take you to task for playing truant, and soon afterwards to despatch you from my place altogether. However, I was not sorry to recall you, and, since that time, I don't remember that I have had to reprove you seriously. I flatter myself that a quiet glance from me would set you right now—and yet you were a wild fellow once, full of martial fire. I believe you have some of that in you now, for your face was flushed with excitement the other evening, when we read of Marlborough's delight in 'the pomp and circumstance of war.'"

"I feel rather strange sensations, sir, when

I read of the charges at Vittoria, Waterloo, and Balaclava."

"I dare say; and you would trace out with enjoyment the tactics of Rostopchin at Moscow. By the way, make a note that I want to look up shortly what Livy and Xenophon tell us about the lustration of armies. It is better for you to read of military exploits and usages than to go to the wars and very probably perish, like Melichus, of many wounds. I don't know that I have much more to say, unless I close with a little counsel. It is needless for me to recommend sincerity and emphatic moral tone to you. I trust that you will face the future manfully; that you will be frugal and tractable, though not mercenary and servile, like the Carians of whom we read last night in Aristides. And while you are careful with your purse, I should wish you to be liberal in your sympathies; and while you are strict in self-control, to be

lenient in your judgment of others. Be careful of speech, George Hern, a respectful and uninterrupting listener, and always be courteous to females."

"I will try to bear your words in mind, sir, and to do my duty," said George Hern, getting a little tired of making such assertions.

"Do so. The task of striving to reach a good position will be attended with satisfaction, whatever the end. You will enjoy the conscious power engendered by the improvement and development of your mind, and the knowledge that you are gradually becoming more capable of coping with the world. It would be folly for me to doubt that my help will be of great benefit to you. The encouraging signs of friendship from one in a higher station, and the companionship of a patron with some pretensions to intellect and culture, are likely to be appre-

ciated by one who has experienced somewhat of the unspeculative simplicity of the humbly-born."

Boulder had returned from his second incarceration, and, much comforted by the good position of his son, who had been the one engrossing subject of his lonely meditations in his absence, had resumed his work on Heathhammock beach with much of his former vigour. The eighty pounds for stamp-duty, the few incidental expenses connected with the articles, and a small portion of the "easy payments," had been placed in Mr. Oscar Ashbocking's hands, and George Hern was an articled clerk of two years' standing.

It was late in the afternoon of a Saturday in autumn, and a chill, rather ominous of coming frosts, stole in at Mr. Ashbocking's study window, whence George Hern was

looking upon the garden, where the deepening shadows were stealthily veiling the hues of the quivering sere leaves, that had glowed like amber drops and flakes of gold in the sunlight of earlier hours, and darkening the long, wide, purple aisle which wound across the sky between vast banks of dull grey cloud.

It was my hero's duty to write out pencilled extracts from a copy of Newman's work on the "Arians of the Fourth Century," which was lying open on the table; but it was evident that something else engaged his thoughts.

Suddenly the door opened, and, with a flushed face, he saw Miss Ashbocking enter. She asked him to find "Kater on the Length of the Pendulum" for Mr. Kidd Ashbocking, and Glassford's "Italian Lyrics" for herself.

He handed her the books with a hesitating

air, but said nothing. As, however, she walked towards the open door, he marched resolutely past her and closed it. Then he faced her, with signs of strong feeling in look and voice.

"I have resolved to ask a question," he said. "It fills me with fear and forebodings, but I cannot put it off another hour. It is, whether I may be so bold as to hope that in some future day—some very far-off day, when I have fought my way by intense, uncompromising labour—into a fair position you will condescend to accept my love, and crown your many kindnesses to me by trying to give me a little of yours?"

Clara Ashbocking started, and the blood rose to her cheeks. She glanced at him for a moment, turned away, and, drawing herself up, said proudly, but in a voice that faltered nevertheless :

"Your words are so strange they bewilder

me. Is my kindness to end in this? Is my sympathy to be destroyed for ever to-day?"

"I deserve this!" exclaimed Hern, as he pushed aside, with a gesture of bitterness, an old volume of Tod's "Spenser," upon which his hand had rested. "My forebodings were better prophets than my crazy hopes. Forgive me, Miss Ashbocking. Do not break my heart with coldness or reproaches. I did not rightly view the greatness of the sacrifice I asked of you, till now."

"Friendship I willingly showed you," she said, slowly and with reproach in her voice, "for I thought you needed it; at least, you were one of the poor—the class from whom I always wish my character to be learnt. But I hardly expected that one of these, that even you, whom I will in justice call the best of these, would claim me for a lover. Oh, George Hern, do you think I stand in dread

of becoming a crotchetty and unappreciated spinster, a blue-stocking ?"

"Forgive me!" he again exclaimed, and with thrilling earnestness, for her glance now seemed almost cruel. "I have not forgotten my history—my position; but my ambition and my great love have led me to this folly, which no doubt you regard as a pitiable burlesque. I should have remembered that the misdoings of my family," he added bitterly, "must be added to my own, and debited against me. I should have remembered that I must bring disgrace on any one, even in my own poor station, who is linked with me in marriage, and that my struggles to advance honourably must still leave me somewhat an object of pity. I need say no more. I shall at least have the one poor comfort, Miss Ashbocking, of walking in soul with you henceforth, for my love (or madness) is not transient. Oh, you have

been so kind to me, that I fondly hoped there might sometimes be a mysterious power or charm in the human soul to counterbalance low origin and unhappy history, and beyond the reach of the thorn of social pride; that your spirit might have discovered a little worth in mine, to set against my shortcomings. But it is folly to speak of minor hopes, when I confess that I hoped to gain your love, and to earn, in time, your friends' consent to your marriage with a lawyer's clerk, Uriah Heep and Mr. Guppy notwithstanding."

Clara's eyes seemed to be gradually softened as he spoke.

"You have astonished me," she said very gently. "Forgive me if my words have been unkind. Believe me, I pity you from my heart."

"Thank you!" he exclaimed, taking comfort from her altered tones. "You have pitied me in the past, and I hoped, like a fool, that

your pity might bring forth love, as pity has done ere this, and foster it."

"I would not be unkind," she continued. "Let us not cease to be friends. I may have encouraged and misled you more than I meant to do. I will be candid as you are. I have admired you very much; your courage, your kindness, your loyalty to duty, your energy and your success have pleased me. I have been proud of my small share in the last. That the interest I took in you has led to sorrow I deeply regret."

She prepared to leave the room, but he begged her to hear a few more words from him, and said with great fervour:

"From the time, and it was very early, when I outgrew the boy's sceptical contempt for sexual love, you have been to me the image and type of perfect loveliness of face and form, the ideal of surpassing beauty of character. I have tried to think tenderly of

Mrs. Swindell and her daughter, because they are of the same sex as you. I have yearned to become more intimate with you. It has been my greatest comfort to hear you speak, or to catch the sound of your voice as you sang far away in the old blue drawing-room ; and to look at and handle tenderly the few flowers you have given me."

A deeper blush covered her face, but she did not move.

"I know your birthday is on the 2nd of May," he continued. "On the second of every month, at night, in my solitary bedroom, I humour myself by placing a chair before me, imagining that you are seated there, and toasting you with a glass of water. Do not ridicule this solemn mockery ; it is very dear to me, and I enter into it with more enthusiasm than you can guess."

"Your enthusiasm," said Clara, smiling gently, "amid the bare and unromantic sur-

roundings, would not be without a pathetic charm, I think, if one could witness it."

"Those are kind words! Oh, Miss Ashbocking, you will have lovers, men who will prove your power over them, no doubt, by loss of appetite, wandering thoughts, and incoherent speech; or who will show their earnest wish to please you by flattery and sprightly speech, and such mighty care in their appearance as suggests the companionship of pocket looking-glasses. But it cuts me to the heart to think that you will give your love to one who cannot value it so much as I should do. God grant the loss of it do not make me a villain—the victim of false and perilous imaginations, and of an aching heart for ever!"

She gazed at him thoughtfully, still blushing, sighed, and walked to the door. Some rain-drops beat against the window, and a rising breeze made it quiver. Then

she turned, and said in a firm, clear voice :

" I appreciate your gratitude ; nay, more, I respect your sincerity and value your affection. I promise you I will think earnestly, and, with God's help, justly, on these revelations of your heart. I am not afraid, George Hern, to obey my conscience. I will never marry one who cannot convince me that his love for me is as warm and true as yours !"

A bright, joyous look flashed into his face.

" Then there may be some hope for me," he cried in a suppressed voice, for her fingers were on the door-handle. " It is a wild thought, but there is hope for me ; and I will wait and trust. This hope will make the old dull office as sacred a haunt to me as the bower to the lover of Petrarch's cruel beauty. It will purify and elevate any ugly sordid task that falls to me, and will spiritualise my daily

drudgery. I don't wish to study my own interests too selfishly: I will watch over and serve your father's faithfully, too; but I will advance! I shall feel more confident, now, in such powers as I possess, and perhaps discover a few poor gifts of which I have been unconscious."

She half-turned from him, but still seemed riveted to the spot.

"Excuse my stupid boasting," he continued. "I will indeed try to deserve praise, though I would rather be trodden upon than flattered. I will work with such a zeal at night, after your father has dismissed me, that I shall thank the wind for muffling from my ears the warning voice of the clock. I cannot think of moderation! My brain is full of grand impracticable projects! Potterings and hesitation are incompatible with aims so fondly cherished, yet so high, as mine. From to-day my only recreation shall be to talk and

walk a little with my poor old father; to exchange, if I may, a few words sometimes with you, and often every day to think of you!"

He paused, and Clara Ashbocking withdrew. But, sitting in the great red chair by her bedside, with her face hidden in her hands, she became conscious that the ardent, loud-voiced young man, whose words still rang in her ears, had just strengthened strangely a certain hold he had for some time been fixing upon her heart. In simple truth there was springing up within her a love for this poor fellow which neither Bethell Ormerod, Esquire, of Cuttles Warren, nor Harold Audrey, the rich young rector of Heathhammock, could charm away.

CHAPTER VIII.

Mr. Oscar Ashbocking's house, which stood on the right hand side of Cliff Street, was ancient, massive, roomy and dull, with great echoing passages and many chambers that were seldom used—I cannot say seldom entered, for Mrs. Oscar was not likely to leave the darkest nooks long unexplored.

It was flanked on the east by stables and carriage-houses, used in more recent years for storage of wood and lumber, which were approached from the street through a ponderous spiked gate, between stone columns topped with gaping lions. Behind the house was a good space of garden, sheltered by

large venerable trees and lofty walls, and beyond that lay a shadowy grove, reaching to the Common, which formed the southern boundary of the town, and stretched by its side to the beach.

Soon after breakfast on the day following that of Storker's return to Heathhammock, Clara Ashbocking descended to the kitchen, as was her custom, to gratify Swidger with a little gossip, and to consult with her as to Mrs. Oscar's probable orders for the day. She found her mother, however, already with the ancient cook, to whom she was dealing out some impressive words for her neglect to put her bit of floor-cloth before the kitchen fender instead of the old Brussels hearthrug, during the busy hours of the day.

"As Storker is coming to dinner to-day, Clara," said Mrs. Oscar, turning to her daughter, "I should like to put something nice upon the table. I told him he must not

expect an evening dinner here. We won't alter our two o'clock hour for anyone, unless, indeed, your father particularly wishes it. Now, Swidger—why, I think you must have passed a bad night from your looks, which are sour."

"No, indeed, ma'am," said the sallow Swidger, in rather croaking tones, issuing from thin lips overshadowed by a nose like a puffin's beak; "I know your poor opinions of my health and strength, none better; but I slep' in peace, and I call on Emmer Trippington to say if I speak false."

The timid personage appealed to prepared to shuffle away into the back-kitchen, but was arrested by the solemn look which her aged bedfellow turned upon her. She muttered, in a scarcely audible voice, that Swidger slep' as quiet as a babe unborn; not that she wished to contradick her mistress, for Swidger did sometimes make that dread-

ful noise in her sleep as gave her the shivers.

"I must say your countenance looks bilious, Swidger; but I should remember that you seldom show a very agreeable face when there is a likelihood of a little extra work," said Mrs. Oscar.

"Beggin' your pardon, ma'am," said Swidger, making a poor attempt to draw up her decrepit and deformed old body. "Shirk my work I do not. I've not been that woman for one day o' the five and forty year I've minded this here kitchen fire. Peace o' conscience! it ain't one meal I've got ready for folk from Castle House, though Mr. Kidd have altered it so as his father mightn't know it if he was lifted out of his grave. I cooked a late dinner with more courses, ma'am, than you'd approve for Admiral Howsegoe, as was captain then, when he come to Heathhammock with his wife, and the gentlemen played

at cards, and the money rattled till after cock-crow; and they went to bed as I come down, and the captain looked offal glum and grisly for a bridegroom, and was as blue as the old drawin'-room itself. I see him plain, for he knocked agen me so as I thought I was going to tumble down a matter of thirteen stairs, for I wore boots full long for me then, which I shall do till I'm bed-rid, to spare my corns, not that I've many, thank the Lord!"

"I have no wish to quarrel with your boots," said Mrs. Oscar; "but one can hardly admire those long cloth things, turning upward at the toes."

"Let us not laugh at her corns and her comfortable boots," interposed Clara; "I think that great credit is due to you, for the way in which you get through your work at your age, Swidger, and so does my mother. Every Englishwoman should be proud of the class to which you belong—the old-fashioned

servants! Besides, we don't forget, that in times when those hands were a good deal less knotty and creased, a certain legendary offer of marriage was refused by you for no apparent reason but your disinclination to leave this house and to deprive us of your services."

These were comforting remarks which had been made before on like occasions. Swidger was seen to smile, though grimly. She also took encouragement to speak again.

"The old house," she said, "is good enough for me. I hevn't slep' away from it for three and thirty year; and it's like bein' out of England, a'most, when I go into the streets. And, as to leavin' Heathhammock, I'd as lief go away to sea like the winter. And talkin' of orfers o' marriage, Miss Clara, I'm glad to hear it said that you'll marry Mr. Kidd's son. For the kneadin' together o' the two batches o' the family, now there's so few o' the old

stock left, seem to sound proper and right; and it'll be a comfortin' thing for me to see before I die, which I hope I 'ont do this many a day, though missis think me no better than a corpse for the coffin now. But she mustn't count everybody so weak because she's so strong. And if the dinner to-day'll be anything towards the marriage, Miss Clara, I'll do my hearty best. And, talkin' o' marriages, there's Emmer Trippington tell me George Hern is like to marry Becky Swindell; and I'm not so pleased about it, for, though not a marryin' woman myself, I thought Emmer Trippington might, though more ungain than might be, and by some called Soft-head; and why not George Hern for her? He's kind to her and no better bred, though risin', and that's the truth. But, as to breedin', who better than the Howsegoes? But old Mr. Habor Howsegoe, I've heard, had a hand as heavy as a hedge-stake carpenter's, and a

nose that could swallow mine, which God forbid !"

Clara had turned away to lift a yellow basin to a shelf, where it was palpably a trespasser. When Swidger ceased speaking, she said, though not in her usual voice, which was as clear as a bell, that she must go upstairs ; and left the kitchen rather hastily.

Her mother watched her with anxious eye, but for the present busied herself with her intended consultation with her cook. She then administered certain sharp chidings to Trippington, whose poor wits she often deprived of some of their limited utility by her severe words—so that gross blunders were committed by the stricken maid, such as the placing of a box-iron on the breakfast table, and of a stove-brush in Mrs. Ashbocking's linen drawer.

After this lady had instilled sufficient bewilderment into poor Trippington (between

whom and herself there was, nevertheless, an odd bond of affection), she went in search of her daughter.

Many parts of the house looked sadly in need of the refreshing hands of the painter and paper-hanger; but Clara's bedroom, in which her mother found her, though very large, and furnished with cumbrous chairs, a towering chest of drawers, and a quaint old "four-poster" bedstead, was a bright and pleasant place. On the walls, among other pictures, were a pair of water-colour studies of flowers, by the Rev. Audrey, presented by himself; and on the mantelpiece stood an alabaster clock, a case of stuffed wheat-ears, a small vase of chalcedony, and some shells. On a crimson shelf beside the bed were a few school-prize books, three modest volumes received from Sunday scholars, and one from a humble friend, since dead, the fly-leaf of which was a little stained with tears;

a work of Audubon was also there, and one of Cornelius Pauw, and lastly, a Bible, the parting gift of Alice Service, who had left Heathhammock with her father.

Clara was sitting at a round table near the window, at work with her French tatting, making, indeed, some woollen reins for the children of Mr. Mudd, the Curate.

As her mother entered, she looked up with rather an anxious expression, despite the efforts she had made to calm herself since her escape from the kitchen. Mrs. Oscar gave her one of her careful glances.

Clara was a tall, fine, graceful, honest-looking girl, with soft, winsome brown eyes, full of tremulous refreshing light, which could change to a richer glow when she was strongly stirred. Her nose was a little too small, while her chin and her well-rounded ears were a little too large. Her upper lip was active and expressive, her lower one plump and round.

Her brow was smooth, and ivory-white as a Circassian maid's. Her cheeks, as her father said, recalled Anacreon's "roses stewed in cream," but they could betray her feelings very suddenly in shifting hues. Above all was a bountiful supply of glossy brown hair.

"You know I am not one to hesitate about matters that may prove of importance, Clara," said Mrs. Oscar, seating herself close to her daughter, and setting the latter's work-box more exactly opposite to its owner; "your strange manner of leaving the kitchen, and the change in your voice, were of course noticed by me, and, as your mother and well-wisher, I should like to know the reason for both."

"I objected to the allusion to a marriage between myself and Storker Ashbocking," said Clara, smiling rather sadly, but speaking in a firm voice.

"I do not wish, my dear, to give you any unnecessary pain," said Mrs. Oscar. "I shall

never try to force you to any marriage against your wish; nor will your father, though he would leave his business with much greater satisfaction to Storker, if he were your husband. He said last night, too, that, as he thinks, with Sir Thomas More, that intermarriages are often an occasion of peace, he would be glad to see you reconcile me to Admiral Howsegoe by your marriage with his grandson. If anything can dissuade me from the wish to see you and Storker married," she added, with a bitter smile, "it is the fact that the Admiral has the same wish; I don't want to copy him. I don't care for the man. But, Clara, there's no doubt that he has a great deal of money, which will one day be Storker's, and I confess I should not be sorry to see you Storker's wife, if you can learn to like him."

"Were you pleased with him last night?" said Clara quietly, beginning to hope that

her mother did not suspect that her recent demeanour was in any way caused by the allusions to George Hern.

"Fairly pleased. It would be satisfactory to have your father's business carried on by your husband, the only young Ashbocking left, especially with the banking concern and the Admiral's money also at his command. This arrangement will atone, in some measure, for the disappointment you caused us in regard to Mr. Audrey and Bethell Ormerod."

"Why do you trouble yourself so much about my marriage?"

Mrs. Oscar walked to the mantelpiece, shifted each of the ornaments upon it, and, returning to her seat, said impressively—

"I will tell you why. Some little time ago that impudent girl, Rebecca Swindell, told her mother, who told Bilge her brother, who told Admiral Howsegoe, who told me (not that I want to be in his confidence), that

she believed that George Hern was vain enough to have a sort of half-idea that you had a liking for him, which might possibly lead in time to your marriage with him. Ah, you are blushing; that is a sad and a cruel sign for me to read. I was troubled with doubts on this very subject when you left the kitchen. Let me tell you, Clara, that such a step as your marriage with George Hern would bring your father and myself in sorrow to the grave."

"No, no, it cannot do that," said Clara, a little stung by her mother's tone.

"Good gracious, child! your words alarm me more than your looks. There is, then, some foundation for this incredible report?"

"I love George Hern, and have loved him long; that is the simple truth!" said Clara, bravely.

"You love George Hern!" cried Mrs. Oscar, rising and pacing the room. "Who

would have believed him capable of such daring insolence, such unparalleled presumption, after all the kindness we have shown him? —though, to be just, we have, I think, had value received," she added in a lowered voice.

"Do not attack him," said Clara, "I will bear the blame."

"Blame! I wish to make no enemies, but he is a fool, and must go! I deeply regret that he is now so essential to your father's evening amusements, and is so useful in the office that we cannot get rid of him without injuring ourselves. He is a good worker, and a good man in his way; let him marry the girl Swindell."

"He will never do that," said Clara, very firmly.

"Well, he shall not drag you down; he must go. But I cannot tell the effect of his articles—which, I fear, have spoiled him. I never very heartily approved of them. I

must consult your father. Why did you not tell me of this before ?"

"I have had but few words with George Hern himself, during the past three years, nor should I probably have had many more till he could offer me a home. I do not like secret interviews and correspondence."

"But you have had a tacit understanding."

"Yes," said Clara earnestly; "and few words were wanted. You must forgive my caution and my secresy, mother, on a subject very sacred to me. I feared that my love-compact would be condemned and wondered at."

"I don't wish to talk imprudently, even to my daughter," said Mrs. Oscar ; "but, pray, by what charm has George Hern gained this mighty love ?"

"The ties and links that have made up such a love as mine," said Clara, again speaking very earnestly, "would be as hard to

trace out, I think, as the intertwining branches of a thicket."

"Are you in love with his fine person?"

"Among other items, yes."

"I have long thought that most women are fools, but I have never placed you in that catalogue, till now. No wonder you rejected the advances of others, being secretly engaged already—with George Hern for your lover!"

"With George Hern for my lover, even so."

"This is terrible!"

"God only knows how great a power in the machinery of life is the heart He has given to each of us. I would not marry another man for all the wealth of all the deans and chapters in the realm!"

"This is simply dreadful. This is the end of your practical acquaintance with the lower classes; of your friendliness to the poor. This is your reward, silly girl, for your visits

to the haunts of infection and of dirt, which your father says is naturally as disagreeable to you, as an Hyrcanean tiger would be. This is the recompense for your excursions to alleys and by-ways in the most cold and wet weather (much against my will)—your marriage and settlement for life with one of the poor! I know you would not very willingly incur a suspicion of inconsistency between your actions and professions; but I should not have thought you would have carried your crotchets to such a disastrous extent. Do you find the young men of the lower classes agreeable enough, for the most part?"

"Do not be scornful, mother. My visits are chiefly to women, though often, indeed, to children, with whom it is always a pleasure to me to chat about their little joys and troubles, their humble clothes, and their few toys and flowers. As to George Hern, my engagement to him cannot be put down under the

small list of my actions which I might head 'prompted by duty;' but under the larger list which I should mark 'prompted by desire.'"

"I did not anticipate such a grievous revelation of ridiculous conduct."

"Let us rather say such a bold deviation from what one might call the paved and palisaded path of custom."

"Rubbish! I am astonished that you can even dream of degrading yourself so utterly. I thought you had too fine a heart."

"My heart might as well be an urn of ashes, if it suffered me to feel degraded by the most sincere affection it can feel."

"Such a name as his! Such a vile connection!"

"I look above and beyond these things; but the world seems often as much opposed to spirituality as daylight to the stars."

"The world will take a common-sense view

of the sacrifice you think of making, as I do; you, who might have raised yourself to a very high social grade——"

"I do not wish to hear about social grades, with their shallow jargon and jugglery," said Clara, impatiently. "German silver scorning tinsel, and the cabinet-maker the carpenter—a booby reverenced because he is of patrician lineage; and a true 'gentleman of worship' slighted because his parents ate their supper in a backhouse!"

"But this man's origin, the disgraceful shadow upon his birth!" said Mrs. Oscar, in a tone of disgust.

"You speak as if a poor natural child has no title to the life that is given him, as if his swaddling clothes should be his pall," said Clara, warmly. "I would rather view his misfortune as a fitting background to his virtues, like the blackthorn to its bloom."

"Ah, my child, your pretty little speeches

will hardly be appreciated by the circle to whom George Hern will introduce you. It's fortunate that I have taught you how to make dumplings, and that you had not Mrs. Kidd Ashbocking for your mother. You will have the honour, one day, I suppose, of sitting at meals with Boulder."

A pale flush overspread Clara's face, but she spoke resolutely.

"Do not jeer at him, mother; he is very respectable now, and his great diligence is above praise. Mr. Kidd Ashbocking is not ashamed to go fishing with him, often."

"Your father's cousin need not be taken as your model while your father himself is at hand. Mr. Kidd's friendship with Boulder is not likely to prove of more profit to him than is his love of fishing (of which sport you did not much approve at one time), or his idea that he is doing good to mankind by puzzling his brains over all sorts of formulas

to prove some such fact as that glue and sausages are the same price per pound. You must not ask me to congratulate you on having Boulder for a father-in-law. It is not a matter to raise rejoicings among the friends of an Ashbocking, the daughter of a true scholar, and a connection of the Howsegoes. I don't wonder at the Admiral's sarcastic allusions to George Hern last night, if he had put any real faith in the girl Swindell's talk—but he had no right to appeal to me."

"Mother," cried Clara, rising abruptly, "what value does the one great Father of us all attach to our petty distinctions of 'family' and 'condition'? His eye, I think, does not pause very long at a man's pedigree, or condescend to mark the differences between ragged and rosetted shoes. Why should we talk as if the blood that has been transmitted through a race of territorial dignitaries would trickle less wastefully from a cut finger?

A queen would take a scavenger's arm in any place of peril, and would lean her cheek on the shoulder of a worse man than Boulder if he would carry her from a wreck to the lifeboat."

Mrs. Oscar assumed her seat with a doleful sigh.

"Perhaps I am partly to blame for this infatuation," she said bitterly. "I have not encouraged your entering freely into society, and have humoured too much my own dislike to company. You have too often been allowed to read poetry, and dream and mope alone in this dull old house since your return from Germany."

"I am sorry if I have spoken thoughtlessly, mother," said Clara. "You have touched me, as it were, rather roughly on a very tender place. I would submit even now to one of the old scoldings for breaking a glass, or spilling tea, or coming late to

meals; but to-day we have talked on a subject upon which I shall have but one opinion to the end. But I know that your love for me leads to your annoyance."

"It will not become me to speak of my love for you, Clara," said Mrs. Oscar gloomily. "Why did I never send you to school till a day after the proper time, in order that you might run less risk of lying in damp sheets? Ask your schoolmistresses whether I showed any anxiety and thoughtfulness about you in my letters and consultations. But I will not talk of these things. I must consult your father. The worst part of this trouble is the blow it will be to his reputation."

"Oh, do not say that!" cried Clara. "George Hern and I will never really injure his reputation. Of course, the revelation will cause some unpleasantness—I have always anticipated that—but my father is a man of liberal mind. I will not marry till George

Hern's position is far better than it is now; I dare almost add, till he cannot be reasonably disapproved of by you. I am sanguine as to his success. Let me, meanwhile, live with you and my father in the old contented way, and do not talk unkindly about my doings to the world. And mother," she added, laying her hand coaxingly on her mother's shoulder, "may I not hope that you will try, for the sake of your love for me, to repudiate the world's prejudices, and to look at poor George Hern's genuine worth as a man. I have heard you say that you would rather judge a woman by her linen-bag than by her plated candelabra. Will you not adopt some of the spirit of that saying when you sit in judgment on the man to whom I have resolved to join myself?"

"I can't answer you, child," said Mrs. Oscar, taking her hand. "There are many other men of genuine worth who have not

half so many disadvantages. There is another saying of mine which you should remember, 'The best of everything—Warwickshire fashion of curing bacon, and Gloucestershire fashion of pickling salmon.' I should like to see you engaged to a man whom I could not reasonably wish to set aside for a better."

On this same morning, at about the time Mr. Oscar joined his wife in the dining-room, the square, weighty, and weak-kneed Admiral Howsegoe, accompanied by Storker, left Castle House for a stroll round Battery Green, and into the town. The young man was not unwilling to see and be seen by some of the Heathhammock public; and the elder was glad, in the first place to secure a private interview with his grandson, and in the second, to cut short and escape from certain comments of his daughter, upon a story left at the back

door with the butcher's joint that morning, to the effect that the Admiral's friend, Mrs. Pittock, had been seen tipsy in Spring Lane, and had tumbled against a donkey, who had kicked her into a ditch.

"The donkey is an odd beast," said the Admiral in his loud tone, "but upon my soul, I feel inclined to classify your mother with him. Mrs. Pittock, my good lady," he added, drawing himself up, and pausing to enjoy a little gusty laughter, "you will want me to help you through with that fine Scerchel Madeira, I doubt; but the report is probably false and malicious."

"I am afraid," said Storker, "that students of society, like those of criminal law, encounter a good deal about malice."

"No doubt, young mister," said the Admiral taking his grandson's arm. "And now," he added, in an unusually low impressive voice, "to come to an important topic. You must

marry Clara Ashbocking. Keep still, and listen to reason. I must see you two tied together before I die; I must see this old wish fulfilled."

"You can hardly wonder at my not keeping very still," said Storker. "Old wish! You know my ideas about marriage. By George, sir! whenever I have seen a bridegroom (since I have been of my present opinion), I have felt inclined to say, 'My good fellow, give each of these groomsmen of yours an over-dose of good liquor and a lighted torch, and let them all reel about among your furniture and goods; they will do you less harm so than by abetting that irrevocable act at the altar.' As to women, I have, as you know, a poor opinion of them. They think more about looks than manners, and more about manners than mind. I make no charge against Clara; but it is pitiable to see so many sensible men under the dominion of

creatures whose spirits can travel little farther than from their boot-buttons to their bonnets."

"Your ideas are false," said the Admiral warmly, but with a cunning look upon his stolid face, "your opinions are those of a young jackass."

"I am not a child, grandfather. Remember, I have travelled, and seen something of life."

"Remember that I have also—I, who lived in this world when salt and wheat were both a guinea a bushel; when a ship's earnings would repay her purchase-money in four years, and a cow would bring you in eleven pounds per annum."

"But your great knowledge of the world may not have made you a very competent judge of young people's affairs of the heart. Because age improves some wines, it doesn't follow that it improves pastry."

"You are in want of age or something else to teach you sense, if you won't act upon the hint I am now giving you, young mister," said the Admiral sternly. "Clara Ashbocking will have an uncommonly good sum of money, sir; you hardly venture to doubt that, I presume?"

"I hope I shall not stand in need of her money. Even were I to do so, I should object to the thought of trying to secure her for its sake. To improve a small income with the dowry of an uncongenial wife is about as wise an act as to kill one's self with poison to cure lightness of sleep. Bank-notes and rent-rolls make fragile matrimonial ties."

"Let us have no more of this," said the Admiral very earnestly; "I say that the chance is not to be lost. She is a nice girl, and will secure you beyond all doubt, and however idle a dog you may turn out, a present share

in, and the ultimate entirety of, her father's excellent business."

"And what about mutual affection?"

"That will appear upon the scene soon enough. If you cannot get to like this girl, you are a greater noodle than I thought. You will have moral worth, a good heart, a pleasant face, a neat figure, money, and position; what else do you want, confound you, to produce affection and secure social peace? Play your cards properly; knock that fellow Hern, of whom I have my suspicions, out of the field, and speak prettily to the girl."

"I will never, for a single moment, play the humbug with pretty talk," said Storker, impetuously; "I would not be bribed to speak idle and unbecoming words to Clara by an offer of the Atlantic Ocean or the stars; I would rather eat a live fish, or a pot of pomade. I should certainly be sorry to see her marry such a man as Hern; but I am not fitted to

marry her myself. How can I reconcile my views on shooting, for instance, with hers—I, who shot twenty-seven hares with my own gun one day in February of last year? You may have noticed some sickliness in my morality at times, sir, but I cannot play the humbug with Clara."

"I should not trouble to refer you to her at all, if I did not consider her essential to you."

"That's a strong word—'essential.'"

"I see I must make a clean breast to you, and tell you, though in the strictest confidence, that I am afraid your father won't be able to do much for you; that he is to some extent playing ducks and drakes with his business."

"Ancient, these are prodigiously unpleasant words. Your authority for them?"

"Again in confidence, Anguish."

"What did he tell you?"

"Many things; but I cannot go into details."

"Of what does he complain?"

"Your father's unpunctuality, incautious way of giving credit and nursing worthless debtors and defaulters, and his want of real interest in the business. He is not careful enough in handling his good customers. For instance, only a day or two ago, he offended Archdeacon Parrotts by turning away during some remarks of his upon railway investments (a subject on which the Archdeacon generally works himself into a perspiration), to catch a curious spider. I don't say the substituted employment was not the most profitable, but the Archdeacon thought otherwise, and has withdrawn his account from the bank. Your father is an arrant 'fiddler,' and you can make nothing else of him. I have heard you say he would spend half a lifetime filling a bath with gnats' blood."

"Yes, yes! but this is an unmitigated disappointment to me," said Storker, gloomily. "I thought that in spite of his peculiarities he looked sufficiently well to the main point to guide such a fine old business."

"You were wrong."

"He has brains and business capacity."

"But little common sense. Looking at the plain surface of the fact as it is, for I have not much philosophy in me, I say that I want you to marry Clara. I shall entice your father to retire from the business with what money he has yet left, to leave Castle House, and to polish it up a little for you and Clara—it is rather large for a young couple, but so will her fortune be—and I will live with you and prepare to die happy. As to my money, you will hear something about it after my death; till then, I can't perch on a currant-bush and get a dinner, like a sparrow, so I must live with you, and you must make me

comfortable; and till my death you must live on Clara and your own energies. With Mr. Oscar's help, you might make a good thing yet of the bank, for he has some business in him, though a 'fiddler,' too, as far as words go. It's a pity your father did not ask me to help him with advice, for though I have been a man of pleasure, my thoughts have not been confined to whist and loo, basset, piquet, crimp, and lansquenet. I have some business in me."

"My father said yesterday that he might retire from business before very long."

"He will be glad to get out of harness, and won't object to go with some of his treasures into a smaller house, especially if he can mess about with a little land. And I'm sure he will be delighted to superintend any improvements at Castle House."

"Surely we shall need none, even if the rest of your queer plans are carried out. My

father certainly likes to play the amateur architect, builder, and mechanic. I have sometimes thought that Mr. Oscar would make himself comfortable in a police cell, with an attentive listener and a moderate temperature; and my father, I believe, would take a good spell on the treadmill, if he were urged to criticise or improve upon its machinery. By George, sir! when he retires from business, how he will plunge into profitless and abortive experiments! But I'm ashamed of this tone of levity. As Rochester says, 'I've got a blow;' my prospects do not make the respectable appearance I had anticipated, and it's rather confusing to be asked to patch them up by a sordid and dishonest courtship."

"To the devil with all stupid scruples! Her mother wishes to see you married to her, that's all I've got to say."

"Did she tell you so?"

"No, she tells me nothing worth hearing;

but I have formed a pretty clear idea that she does, from hints she has dropped."

"She does not know my father's circumstances?"

"No, thank God."

"You think that she has a strong seasoning of that gall with which the world is apt to impregnate the constitutions of all of us? How, then, will it fare with me, when she finds out that I knew and kept from her the true state of things at the bank when I married her daughter?"

"I can't argue with you. If you play your cards well, you can manage both her and her husband. He, too, would like you to succeed to the business. I don't much like his silly fancy for young Hern; but he's easily led, or I'm mistaken, if one can only listen to his gabble. Why, the other day, when he had got Swindell before him to reprimand him for being drunk, he didn't say one hard word,

because the fellow listened patiently to some sort of general talk on drunkenness ; and the culprit having sworn that he was only a little elevated, not, as had been said, 'as drunk as blazes,' the interview ended in a good-humoured explanation of the curious origin of that last word. You'll have a chance of beginning your tactics at dinner to-day, young mister."

"I am afraid, sir," said Storker, "that your hopes concerning this matter are of a rather vaporous character."

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. OSCAR paced sadly from Clara's bedroom to her own, and the haggard expression which stole into her face in the solitude, told how fondly she had cherished the hopes that had been marred by her daughter's determination, and how serious were her fears as to its results. After a short spell of meditation she rang the bell. Trippington appeared, and at once noticed the unhappy looks of her mistress.

"Is it neuralgy, ma'am?" she asked timidly. "Shall I get you the quinine?"

"Get me nothing, Trippington, unless you

have any remedy for a headache caused by a troubled mind."

"If it is hollow teeth, ma'am, that's racking you," said Trippington, encouraged by the absence of severity from the doleful tones of her superior, "my sister Jane in London had a bottle o' stuff——"

"I want you to go into the office," said Mrs. Oscar more dryly, "and to ask one of the clerks to find out whether your master can spare me a few minutes in the dining-room at once."

The town-clerk replied to the message in person, anticipating serious news—as nothing of small import would induce his wife to entice him from the office during business hours. He gazed anxiously at her gloomy face, and she told him shortly of her interview with Clara.

"It is indeed a grave dilemma, which I did not foresee," he said, shaking his head.

"Grave! Is not it rather a terrible dilemma?" she cried. "I don't wish to speak rashly, but is it not the very worst calamity that could possibly befall us?"

"Well, I hardly think we may call it that," he said gently.

"I have often feared you would spoil George Hern."

"Our daughter may be persuaded from a position to which you so strongly object."

"*I* strongly object? Don't *you?* I am glad I never greatly encouraged your attachment to this young man. Don't *you* strongly object?"

"Perhaps not so strongly as you. But as you do strongly object, I repeat that our daughter may be persuaded from this engagement."

"She is thoroughly firm. But, tell me, Oscar, will you—can you admit that your strong liking for George Hern leads you to

modify your opinions about this false and ruinous step? Have you forgotten the talks we have had about a marriage between Clara and your cousin's son, the last of the family, and one who could carry on your business?"

"No; but since the failure of our well-meant, but, perhaps, somewhat foolish arrangements *re* Audrey and Ormerod, I have grown less hopeful of securing such a husband as we (in petty prudence rather than in broad wisdom) think fit for our daughter. I hope that your wishes will always have with me the authority of Manlian Edicts (I have not thrown an envelope into the fire for at least six days—each one has gone into the waste basket) but, to speak candidly, Mary Ann, to one who can appreciate candour, I think we ought to admit a third party into these councils of ours, now—our daughter herself."

"Am I, then, no longer fit to exercise the

influence I have for years exercised in this house ?"

"Yes; but when our daughter is in question——"

"And George Hern !" said the lady bitterly.

"Well, for George Hern I ask justice; for our daughter I ask indulgence, and simply appeal to your love. Let us not deal thoughtlessly with her in such a weighty matter."

"You are right," said Mrs. Oscar in a low tone, and with difficulty suppressing a sigh at the discovery of a new era in her life; "I would not injure her, nor would I lead her wrong in any way."

"She can scarcely have a better guide."

"I did not anticipate that you would find it necessary to defend our girl, as it were, against me. You are right to prevent her from obeying her mother to her own preju-

dice. Be sure you warn her also not to imitate my faults."

Mr. Oscar led his wife to the sofa and spoke some consolatory words to her. A short discussion followed, and it was arranged that Clara should be prevailed upon to stay for a time with some relations of her mother's in the north of England.

"And I will try, if you strongly wish it," said Mr. Oscar, "to accustom myself by degrees to dispense with Hern's help. I confess I shall miss him very sadly; but if he leaves me shortly after the expiration of his articles—he cannot leave before—he and our daughter might not meet for some time, and their mutual affection might cool. As to Storker, I could benefit him without linking him to our daughter in a marriage that might break her heart."

"But if Clara will not give up George Hern?"

"We cannot make her do so. Indeed, I should be very reluctant to meddle with a pair of true and ardent lovers. It would be like making a raid upon a sacred place. The tender vanities, the shadowy sublimities of young lovers——"

"I must again refer you to the many practical inconveniences of this love affair," said Mrs. Oscar curtly.

"It will be, no doubt, attended with some inconveniences," he remarked.

"How coldly you speak of it; can you not reason seriously with George Hern?"

"Yes; but you must remember that he must gain greatly by the marriage, and can lose nothing, unless it be his temper now and then, under the bitter suggestions which, Goethe tells us, men at ease are apt to inflict upon men in love."

"But you will not pledge yourself in any way to him?"

"No; though, like Sir Francis Drake, I am easy of access, I am not, like him, liberal of promises."

"I know you are not with most people," said Mrs. Oscar, rising, and once more resorting to the adjustment of mantelpiece ornaments; "but your treatment of George Hern is beyond my comprehension."

"Ah, Mary Ann, in that study of mine, which our daughter calls 'the best and most unworldly place in the town,' a peculiar fellow-feeling has sprung up between myself and George Hern, which I shall be sorry indeed to lessen. You may think it strange that links of friendship can be forged and fixed between us by note-takings and discussions on such subjects as Chladni's figures, Dinas bricks, the catenarian curve, solar physics and cadastral surveys; by speculations on the merits of antagonistic individuals, such as Horace Walpole and Whitfield, or Bishop

Hurd and Priestley, and by attempts at concise definitions of such words as 'genius' and 'chiaroscuro'—I have passed many happy hours with George Hern."

"Most people would think your amusements dull as well as eccentric."

"Perhaps so. Last night, for instance, we were engaged with some of the peculiar chronological dicta of Scaliger and Calvisius. The night before we were comparing the similarity in the opinions of such different writers as Burton and Jules Simon on the study of divinity; and then proceeded to take some notes on the erudition of Court de Gébelin. I shall at least have the satisfaction, when I part with Hern, of knowing that I have made him more erudite, in a certain way, than ninety-nine of every hundred men he will meet. He will never confound, as some might, the 'Cotswold Games' with the 'Diversions of Purley,' or the Commentary on the

Itinerarium of Antoninus the geographer with the Commentaries of the Emperor of the same name."

"I am afraid such knowledge will not prove of much service to him, though it is, no doubt, an ornament to you. And now, as you have been finding fault with me this morning, I am going to ask you why you do not try and write a book that will pay you for all this work in the study?"

"Ah," said Mr. Oscar, rather uneasily, "that task would demand more time than I can spare. Perhaps, when you allow me to retire from business, I may produce some essays after the pattern of that 'breviary of honest men,' the great work of 'downright Montaigne.' At present my conversation is not likely to be rivalled by my written works, as in the case of Coleridge, and certainly not to be surpassed by them, as in the case of Corneille."

CHAPTER X.

A FEW minutes before the appointed dinner-hour Storker knocked at the door of Mr. Oscar Ashbocking's office, and was admitted to his presence.

"You look trim and comfortable here, sir," he said. "My grandfather declares that he often detects a sort of sulphurous atmosphere in lawyers' offices; but he could not take this place as an illustration, for the scent from the garden through that open window is of a character quite antipodal to that."

"This is a pleasant room," said Mr. Oscar; "and I am glad you approve of it,

for your own office overlooks the garden. Sit down."

"Thanks. I'm not afraid of a lawyer's chair, though to some people it conveys as grim an idea as the Atlantic roll. I have passed the Giants' Causeway, and have been behind the scenes in a lawyer's office. So neither roll nor chair has any terrors for me. I trust you will pardon a little trespass on your valuable time. I have come, as it were, just to introduce myself to my future sphere. You are busy, I suppose, as usual?"

"Yes; I am generally pretty closely engaged. Vacuna has little court from me."

"I'm sorry to say that hard work never presented any great attraction to me; never, indeed, seemed to agree very well with me. I hope, however, that I shall be able to give you some useful help in practical business, since you're so kind as to offer to take me in.

But you mustn't look to me for any knowledge of the nicer points of theory. Law-reading was always irksome to me. You can pose me in a moment with questions on the doctrine of 'Scintilla juris,' or on the principles of 'Constructive fraud,' or 'Contingent remainders.'"

"You did not try for honours at your final examination?"

"I might as hopefully have attempted the task of Œdipus. I could never make a persevering attack upon a multiplicity of hardly-distinguished details: hence my knowledge of theory is of a very incomplete character. And as to my knowledge of practice, though I stuck pretty well to the office work, I doubt it is narrow of compass. I should be apt to confound the Secondaries' Court with that of the Stannaries, and so forth. I state these things that you may not base any great expectations on me. Confound the old law-

books! A monster bonfire of a million of them would be a better spectacle than that of twenty scolding old women running a race, blindfold, with a lot of crockery secretly set in the course."

"I am sorry you have neglected theory," said Mr. Oscar, "as you would have found the study of it of much service to you in after-life."

"I presume, sir," you don't trouble yourself much about the niceties of theory now, do you? Practical life does not call upon us to deal with petty, intangible and unappreciable technicalities, does it? If so, I had better set myself to dissect the brains of a periwinkle than enter this office."

"I hope I am, in business, a practical personage," said Mr. Oscar. "For instance, you observe that these papers are arranged in orderly fashion?—thanks, in a great measure, to my wife."

"Yes, sir; I have heard of your orderly habits, and I certainly see before me proofs of them. This table looks as if it might have been arranged by a man of the most punctilious tidiness—one who, if he had two moments in which to escape from a burning house, would run up to the top storey to set a box straight which he had left standing awry. But I must learn not to chatter so much, or Mrs. Oscar, whom I must secure as my friend, will take a dislike to me. A lawyer, she thinks, should be reticent; and yet it is surely better to give your clients some words, than to charge them thirteen and fourpence for merely wiping their feet on your door-mat."

"You must try to please my wife," said Mr. Oscar; "and, I acknowledge, the task may not be unattended with difficulties. She is a keen observer of details; would never spell Frederic with a *k* without in-

quiries, and never speaks or writes the words 'et cetera.' She abhors want of order and unpunctuality. I will take this opportunity of saying, too, that I hope you will not bring any dogs you may have to this place; for though Mrs. Oscar would not, with Terence, regard the entrance into the house of a strange black dog as a prodigy of ill omen (having little more respect for the ghostly and supernatural than Allan Ramsay), she would consider it an objectionable experiment."

"I will try to please the lady, sir, though I am not much accustomed to make efforts to conciliate the sex."

"Many a man who has made a boast to the like effect has afterwards talked in a very different strain."

"Belying his words, eh, like the atheist who broke a blood-vessel and died at the commencement of an energetic discourse on

the sufficiency of this present life for any reasonable being? To change the subject, have you a decent staff of clerks, sir, now? I heard that Creaks is still with you."

"Yes; and Creaks is a faithful fellow. He tells me he has lost eight teeth in this office. His son is also with me, and is a tolerable clerk. Amos Splint, though weak in the eyes, has brains; a fact, I am told, he has more than once evinced by over-reaching his father (a shrewd dealer) in bargains. He is rather conceited, however, and is a little too fond of trying to find out faults in the work of the other clerks. Then I have Chipperfield, and a tall young fellow they call Ramrod, but whose name is Spink. But the best man, by far, is George Hern, the articled clerk, who is formed, as it were, to my hand. He has much of the material of a 'Grillon' or an 'Outram' in him, but is a most estimable lawyer's clerk."

At this juncture the dinner-bell was heard.

A shadow had fallen upon each of the four persons who sat down in the dining-room, and each of them was more or less ill-at-ease. But not one of them could be called a reticent person, and the master of the house was certainly not willing to let his conversational powers stagnate.

"We live in a homely sort of fashion here, Storker," he began, "and are sometimes contented, as it were, to eat our knuckle of veal without bacon. Nor have we, like Pythagoras and the ancient priesthood of Egypt, an antipathy to a mess of beans."

"I shall enjoy your unpretentious hospitality, no doubt," said Storker, welcoming, with a genuine smile of pleasure, the share of fish handed to him by the nervous Trippington.

"Will you try a little of our home-brewed beer?" continued Mr. Oscar. "It was made with snow-water. We always have a kilderkin in broach. It suits us as well as usquebagh. Clara, hand Storker that sauce. I think he will like it, if I explain—or would he prefer a little of that tomato?"

"He will hardly care to hear the histories of our few viands, father," said Clara, turning to Storker a smiling face which pleased him.

"No, no," said Mr. Oscar, good-humouredly. "Such histories might reveal certain struggles between your mother and tradesmen, in the matter of price, which would not sound romantic. I only hope, my dear," he added, in a lively tone, to his wife, "that prices are not purposely raised when you are seen approaching, and then reduced under the pressure of your rhetoric."

"That old joke doesn't offend me," said

Mrs. Oscar, snappishly. "But why don't you call me 'Scrab' at once? I know my nicknames, and treat them with contempt; but I hardly expected to hear them almost recalled in this company."

"I am far from wishing to hurt your feelings in any way," said Mr. Oscar, with propitiating mildness.

"If you would prefer that Swidger should do the shopping, say so," continued his wife. "The brisket of beef which we shall have today may not seem to you to be worth the price I agreed to pay for it; if so, reprimand me."

"You know my father won't do anything of the kind, mother," Clara interposed. "That 'countenance of stern commandment' is quite unnecessary."

"Swidger might know something of butcher's meat," continued Mrs. Oscar, without glancing at her daughter; "but as to the difference

between holland, duck and dowlas, I doubt if she is aware of it; so she could not well do the general shopping. But Trippington might be taught. I must not have my peculiarities and my careful ways meddled with," she added, turning abruptly, but somewhat apologetically, to Storker. "I like to have 'value received'; I detest unnecessary expenditure, and I detest waste in every shape and form. I often think that, if I were a mighty potentate, I would make all the farmers in the land feed their stock upon vegetable refuse, mixed and made palatable with the best spiced food."

"I must make a note of that for my father," said Storker, though not in his merriest tone, for certain gloomy details of his grandfather's unpleasant news recurred to him.

"If you are wise, I think you won't say much to encourage his agricultural taste," said Mrs. Oscar; "It may prove an expensive one."

Storker appreciated this remark of the careful housewife, but did not reply.

"I don't wonder that a farmer's healthy life should seem tempting to people whose business keeps them much indoors," said Clara.

"Nor I," said Storker; "I should not object to spending some hours of every day in the fields."

"You can claim to be, in part, what the code of Terpsichore demands for 'the pastoral,'" said Mr. Oscar, "viz., 'thick-set and vigorously constructed.'"

"I don't think I have any great ambition to be 'pastoral-looking,'" said Storker, with a furtive glance at the uncomplimentary reflection of his face in his spoon. "I don't think a London 'bus-conductor would be likely to ask me if my mother knew I was out. But 'the pastoral' has as refreshing a sound, I think, for many a man in our profession as it

could have for an eye-sore maker of wigs or mender of watches."

"Your work is rather dry and dull, is it not?" said Clara, with a certain expression of weariness on George Hern's face very vividly before her.

"It is," said Storker, emphatically. "You might find proof of that in the eagerness with which judge and counsel welcome a joke in court; and in court the liveliest side of our business is seen."

"The humours of the police court had a strange attraction for Munden," said Mr. Oscar.

"Don't you think the public would reap some benefit if lawyers took a little more of this pastoral enjoyment?" said Clara. "The fresh air might improve their health and spirits, and make them unwilling to stir up strife."

"You are wrong, child," said Mrs. Oscar,

curtly; "they would lose money over their 'pastoral enjoyment,' if you mean by that their farms, and there would be a mighty excess of litigation till they were recouped."

"Which they would soon be, I suppose," said Clara, "if litigation is so expensive a luxury as public opinion (or prejudice) affirms."

"I wish to say nothing to the disparagement of the profession," said Mrs. Oscar; "an honourable lawyer earns his living as worthily as a parson."

"Still, you must admit that litigation is often an expensive luxury," said Mr. Oscar, mildly. "Unless a litigant sues *in formâ pauperis*, he had better assure himself that he has a proper understanding with his banker. The Board of Trade may proceed with some satisfaction against shipowners, having the Mercantile Marine Fund to fall back upon for the costs. The 'law's delay,' too, is for

the most part a picture from the life; though, it is true, nuisances may be abated summarily, and the tendency of law reformers is towards the simplification of process."

"The law reformers!" said Storker; "who are they? Not the men who have studied the law. I think most of the lawyers I have met with are as cordially conservative as a rich widow with a large family."

"To return to the subject of the combination of farming with our business, Storker," said Mr. Oscar; "Eumæus occurs to me. That man of swine, you know, was also a man of thought and business, a leader of men. Clara is smiling; she thinks me a pedant; but she wont quite class me with the pedantic bore who calls his warm bath his 'Emmaus,' and cannot get into it without quoting Josephus on the subject. But, to resume, our profession does not admit of the attention being turned to other pursuits; though, it is

true, Sir Matthew Hale wrote a discourse on religion, and other unprofessional works, and Mansfield, Blackstone, Jacob and Talfourd were all serious students of poetry."

"If they did not confine themselves to the work of their profession in their business hours," said Mrs. Oscar, "I say that it is probable they did not do their duty in the world properly."

"I should be sorry to think that," said Clara, though agreeably conscious that George Hern was beyond the reach of this reflection.

"You can hardly think it possible that Akenside could have done more good in his generation," said Mr. Oscar, "if he had given himself up to his profession, and had based no hopes upon what he calls 'the sweet magic of harmonious verse?' I am inclined to agree with you, Clara."

"I wish to believe," said Clara, "that he

brought better treasures from the ideal than any he may have overlooked in the actual world."

"An ideal world is a perilous place for giddy young people (who have been thought to be wiser) to make excursions to," said Mrs. Oscar, with some bitterness. "And as to the actual world, it seems to me that young people are now supposed to know as much about it as their elders, and to be justified in showing them disrespect."

"That should not be," said Mr. Oscar, soothingly. "I know that Goethe says one must be young to do great things; but a young person is at best only a learner of life. A young person cannot understand one half of the significance of the lines on Tintern Abbey, or of many a passage in this same Goethe's 'Faust.' I would refer young persons to the celebrated allusion of Lassus to 'Experience.'"

"I have frequently received assurances of this effect from my grandfather," said Storker, laughing. "Come, Clara, you and I must bear in mind that we had better sit down and confine our hopes of life to the mending of old shoes, than delude ourselves with the idea that we can walk alone, without some training from that flinty old drill-master, Experience."

"You won't think so much about amusement as, to judge from your conversation last night, you now do, when you are a few years older," said Mrs. Oscar, with an impatient movement of her feet.

"You will try in vain to dissuade me from taking my amusement," said Storker firmly. "I would as willingly be wedged, head downwards in a tallow-smelter's shaft, as be forced to sit moping in an office from January to December."

"You partly agree with the old triad of

the Kymry, that 'arms, horsemanship, and hunting are the three gentlemanly arts?'" said Mr. Oscar.

"Yes; though I have no practical acquaintance with the first item; nor, indeed, have I, like George Hern, any strong desire to cultivate such acquaintance. I might possibly become an M.F.H., but am as little likely to see my name followed by V.C. as by D.D. I would avoid 'royal peril.'"

"Unless you are prepared to settle down, Heathhammock is not the place for you," said Mrs. Oscar, speaking hurriedly, to distract her visitor's attention from Clara's face, which had flushed slightly at the mention of George Hern.

"Rather than be a mere drudge in Heathhammock, or any other place in this pill-box country," said Storker, "I would go back to America to-morrow."

"I hope, Storker," said Mr. Oscar, "that

your tour has not made you a living contradiction of the dictum of Polynice, 'there is no man who does not love his country.' You must remember, too, that the 'happiness of personal freedom' is emphasized by Goethe as one of the praiseworthy characteristics of English life."

"I hope I am not destitute of patriotism," said Storker. "I believe I am not; but I am not accustomed to much self-examination."

"You young people should practise more introspection," said Mr. Oscar, who was in the act of adding, "as I sometimes tell my young secretary," but, on this occasion, suppressed the allusion. "It is one of the most sublime faculties of the spirit of man!"

"I have not much inclination for it," said Storker; "nor can I imagine that there is much gratification to be derived from it, if it take the form (as it is apt to do) of self-

accusation. One might as well carry a pocket-gallows about with one."

The dinner was despatched amid conversation of this kind, varied, towards its close, by a conscientiously polite allusion, by Storker, to the improvement in Clara's appearance since the date of the framed portrait of her on the wall, which piece of courtesy drew from Mr. Oscar a remark about Farindon's statement that all portraits are flatteries. A simple and short-lived dessert followed, and then Storker went away, promising to begin his duties at the office on the following morning.

"Don't you call him—to use a common expression—a jolly-looking youth, Clara?" Mrs. Oscar asked, when she was alone with her daughter in the drawing-room.

"I should think that is a good description, mother," Clara answered, gloomily.

"Don't you like his appearance, child?" said Mrs. Oscar with a sneer.

"I can't say I admire many fat men," said Clara. "They are so often sensual-looking, and seem to smile at you as if you were a beefsteak; but I should not say this of Storker. He is very good-natured and agreeable, and, though stout, certainly not dull. He can spell blanc-mange and spinach, as well as eat them. I am afraid he thinks we are under the tutelage of rather dull Lares and Penates here, and I think he did not quite appreciate the beer."

"No doubt he would have done us the favour of drinking a pint of our best Burgundy or Bucellas in preference; but dinner-wine is a luxury I am still allowed to forbid. I could improve this young man if I took him in hand for a time. There is a little too much of 'the man of fashion' in his air, and not enough 'if you please'

and 'thank you' in his talk; but he is a very tolerable youth, in my opinion—if that is worth anything, which I begin to doubt."

CHAPTER XI.

Mr. Oscar Ashbocking's summons to the private house did not pass unnoticed by George Hern, whose habit it was to watch with warm interest all communications with that sacred quarter. With the alert and suspicious sensibility of an aspiring lover, he at once fell to picturing some gloomy cause for the solicitor's unusual withdrawal from business in office hours; and his visions were not brightened by the sight of Mr. Oscar's thoughtful countenance and reserved demeanour after his return. He had long connected special difficulties with Storker's arrival at Heathhammock, and it seemed to

him that they had begun to reveal themselves on this first day.

I must be pardoned for inserting a few words here as to my hero's appearance at this time. He was not an Apollo who would have filled the breasts of the taller couples at the head of a chain of school-girls with rapture, but a bold-looking fellow of grand proportions, and with a gracefully-tempered freedom of movement in his athletic limbs, and a pleasant freshness of complexion which many (as Alice Service had done) attributed to his constant sea-bathings throughout the year. Despite his old and ineradicable love of out-door exercise, he had not now the rich hue which used to be seen in his cheek: his many thoughtful indoor hours forbade that; and the high forehead, over which a stray lock of the light hair very often trespassed, was of a very comely whiteness. When his blue eyes were turned downwards, you would

notice that his substantial features, especially the square chin and the protruding, though well-moustached upper lip, were far from perfect; but when he looked up in his bright energetic way, you forgot those defects in watching the signs of intellect and emotion, the eager, thoughtful, sensitive, and determined expressions on the winning sunny face.

His dress was neat, and fitted his fine form well; indeed, he was very particular in this matter, and was so scrupulously clean that he had been called by the slovenly Amos Splint, "a dandy to the skin." His deep horror of dirt disabled him from giving his full attention to a book if the page before him had a removable smudge upon it, and in order to be always ready for these removals, he carried in his pocket a piece of ink-eraser, which he found more effectual than india-rubber.

On this, as on every day, his tasks furnished him with ample employment; but his pauses were more frequent than usual. Mr. Oscar addressed but few words to him, and at six o'clock told him that he should not want him in the study that evening.

This was a disappointment to George Hern, for he had been hoping that in the evening something might transpire to throw light upon the question that had haunted him. He often heard news in the study.

Rather discontentedly, the useful articled clerk locked the door of his little office, adjoining Mr. Oscar's, spread the linen covering over the table in the latter, thus further concealing the papers which were already carefully arranged so as to give as little information as possible to curious or treacherous visitors, drew the green curtains in front of the shelved Reports and Statutes in half-calf bindings, and the uninviting legal

text-books, adjusted some of the japanned boxes against the wall, placing one marked "Simper's Charity" upon another marked "Flaxmannal's Trust," and upon this latter a third labelled "Plummer's Estate," and lastly, drew down the blind before the window, among whose panes a bluebottle-fly was buzzing and blundering lazily.

Hern was allowed to go to and from his lodgings through his employer's garden, into which Mr. Swindell's little premises opened; and this course he now took, muttering to himself, with a sigh:

"I dare say these fancies are baseless and foolish, like so many I have had before; but it's hard to pass weeks and months without anything more comforting than her glances, precious to me as they are. I have set myself a most difficult task, and, now that the time is drawing near when I must take a serious step, I feel that my hopes may have befooled

me more than I had thought possible in my darkest hours. But I have been overworked," he thought, quickening his steps. "The examination over, I shall look at my fortune more boldly."

Mr. Swindell's cottage was prettily swathed in ivy, whose glossy leaves crawled up the very chimneys. It faced Silver Lane, one of the links between Cliff Street and the common, and in its rear was a small garden, connected with Mr. Oscar Ashbocking's by a gate of twisted boughs and a green door, both fixed in one deep archway, whose bricks were thickly clad with jasmine, honeysuckle, and ivy-leaved snap-dragon.

Hern walked through this archway, guarded with its two barriers, and along the gravel-path into the cottage. As he passed the parlour, his trouble was not lessened by the sight of a female's beaver hat which was lying on a chair by the door. There was

nothing offensive about the hat, with its violet plume fastened by a carnelion butterfly set in German silver; but it recalled the unpleasant fact that Miss Rebecca Swindell was at Heathhammock. She had shown him much attention for some time; but during her present fortnight's holiday from the milliner's shop in Bayswater, she had been more demonstrative than ever. Unquestionably a timid look stole into the face of this bold fellow as he hurried up to the little sitting-room occupied by himself and his father, who had lodged here with him ever since his discharge.

This was a quaint little room. Age had made the oak floors so crooked that the furniture had to be kept steady with wedges and mats of folded paper; and the door was so warped from the threshold, that in gusty times, the whining wind swept under it with a force that lifted the few bits of carpet from the boards, and shook the one picture of a

man with a broken nose that hung above the looking-glass. But the luxuriant ivy on the walls formed so good a protection for them against the driving rains, that they did not need the aid of cement without, or battening within, to keep away the signs of damp so common in buildings of a later day.

Traces of Boulder were to be seen here and there, such as a cod-line, a sprat-net, a grapnel, and a brass pocket-compass; but George's books and papers were arranged on a side-table by themselves, if I except the company of his father's punch-ladle, with a guinea set in its bowl. On a stout bracket on the wall was a stuffed bittern in a glass-fronted case, very narrow in comparison with the meadows and fens his lone sad cry was wont to ring across.

George next walked into his bedroom, to splash his face and head with water, and really felt inclined to rest for a little time in

an easy posture on the bed. He gazed hesitatingly at the clean, but ancient, knotted counterpane; but was partly roused from his indolent mood by the fluttering and chirping of sparrows above the sack-cloth in his chimney, up which no smoke had passed for many years. He resolved to read a page or two of "Addison on Contracts" before the arrival of tea, and, perhaps, of his father; but he came to a pause again at the window.

It overlooked the back-garden, and just beneath it was a bed of peach-coloured catch-fly, London-pride, yellow crown-imperial and forget-me-not, surrounding a box shrub, cut rather artistically into the form of a dwarfish man: but Hern's eyes were wandering beyond these objects to such parts of Mr. Ashbocking's grounds as could be seen above the high wall surrounding them.

At this moment, along a path near the edge of the grove, bordered by elms and,

here and there, a silver birch, Clara Ashbocking walked, stopping before a little spindle tree, whose pale green blossoms found fitting mates in some Solomon's seals at its foot. His face flushed with excitement, for he had often told her that this tree was well within view from his bedroom window. She turned her face towards him unmistakably, and waved her handkerchief; and, with a fluttering but joyful heart, he leapt from the window, to avoid passing the parlour again, and hurried into Mr. Ashbocking's garden, and thence into the grove.

In a few moments he stood before a very charming figure, in a simple dark dress and a straw hat decked with rosebuds and sprays of other flowers, who offered him both her hands, and did not shrink at all from his passionate kiss.

"You have the strongest proof of my devotion," he said, in a low but impetuous

voice, "in my not compelling you to give me more of such sweet chances as this."

"Do you think I willingly forbid them?" she said, gently. "I must refer you to my old saying about duty and desire. Well, well, if a time of trouble and censure come to us, we ought at least to find some comfort in such honourable abstinence from secret meetings. But I could not forego a little talk to-day; and if you had not seen me from your window, I should have written to you and risked the fruits of my courage."

"I have been worried with doubts and fears to-day."

"Note, then, how well I know you. My anticipation of that uncomfortable fact was one of the causes of my strong wish to see you."

"You will tell me all that has happened to-day?"

"I will."

They walked to a pine-wood summer-house, which was set amid the ruins of a small chapel, whose few stained fragments of stubborn masonry, mantled with a rich embroidery of gilly-flowers and pencilled geraniums, and silver-streaked and deep green ivy, mingled with the great moving arms of the trees in the heart of the grove. The summer-house itself was embowered in japonica and jasmine, wistaria and climbing-roses, a fragrant haunt, in which the twilight settled early. Near the entrance, among larger brethren, stood an ancient mulberry tree, a little crooked elm overwhelmed with threads of parasites, and a quaint arid oak stump, circled by a ring of deep-hued grass, —the track, legend said, of fairy dances in the olden times. On the ground were some blossoms of white-wood and purple-star anemonies, blue-bells, daisies, and pheasant's-eyes. Here and there, too, could be seen a

late primrose, of which a deep, damp stream-bank might be proud; and a few modest, shadowy violets peeped up among the milk-parsley and the green and golden tinged moss at the roots of a wild pear-tree.

A black-cap, some linnets, and a few other birds were singing dreamily in this favoured retreat of theirs, where no gun had been heard for many years, and with their silvery trill mingled the hollow and monotonous whoop of some member of a family of owls, whose ancestors for generations had nursed their young in a great wych elm hard by. An eyed hawk-moth fluttered about the lance-shaped leaves of a spurge-laurel, a little company of flies were rising and falling with slothful hum among some thick, creamy blossoms of syringa, and a brave squirrel turned his back upon the lovers, and continued his excursion up a beech-tree.

With her hand in Hern's, Clara told him

of the doings of the day, and they exchanged many anxious glances.

"I don't think Storker will molest me," she said at the close of her little history.

"I have always suspected that an attempt would be made to marry you to him, since the defeat of the other eligible husbands," said Hern; "but the few interviews I have had with you were too short to admit of our dealing with this or a thousand other things. What right have I to expect to escape great anxieties? What a proud and a thankful man I ought to be when I think that I still hold possession of you, while others—and such others—have failed!"

"Such others! You speak as if you suffered grievously in comparison with them. As if their superior stations shamed and utterly eclipsed your poor virtues, your courage and generosity, your grand energy, your loyal affection for your father, your

kindly feelings for others. I could see unlovely traits in these eligible persons."

"Surely, too, in me?"

"Perhaps, had I searched in downright earnest. But I did not, could not, criticise you in a similar way. Why, that earnest look at this moment in your eyes would stay me from doing so!"

"You are a cruel critic, no doubt, at the worst of times—you, the beloved of women, children, and the dumb! But you gave these poor men as sharp a pang by shrinking from them as you would have done by taunting them."

"Then be for ever grateful that I did not shrink from you. But this, you know, I could not do. You know how my love has crept over my fears and objections—a queer word: excuse it—like the foam of the rising tide over the sand-drifts and pebble-ridges. Slowly but surely has this tide flowed from

the time when I learnt how highly you valued a kind glance from me, and how it encouraged you in your duties in a rather magical fashion."

"Could I be unconscious of this? How different would my life have been without this consciousness!"

"But even you cannot tell how conscientiously I have striven to identify myself with you, with your joys and sorrows, your difficulties and toils. And I have had a good reward," she added, in a low tone, and looking steadily into his eyes. "I have encouraged good and unworldly feelings; and, I trust, have in small measure preserved in my heart some of the innocence of its young time, when I used to blush and feel real grief as I confessed my sins to God. And have I not learnt, from the example of your noble energy in the right, to foster such impulses to good as stirred within myself? And have I

not been taught a lesson in unselfishness by many reverent glances into a world very different from my own—a world where the shadows have sometimes gathered dolefully—your world?"

"With which I am going to drag you into closer contact. This deed has decidedly an air of selfishness! Proud as I am, how often has the lowered station, which will be a thorn to you in reality, been a thorn to me in anticipation!"

"I think there is a youth who holds a balm for the wounds that thorn will give me—a youth who, whether I was in France or in Germany, kept my thoughts centred on this old home of mine, with its dreamy grove, and the musical walnut-trees, and the gorgeous old-fashioned lilies in the garden. However bright the things around me, when those thoughts stole into my mind, the visionary scene had the greater charm."

"Such words are full of comfort to me. I have often counted among my causes for pride the fact that the thoughts of one who has travelled far, and been in many different scenes, should turn from them to a man who has been pent up in this little place, only leaving it for the two journeys to London at my examination times—a narrow-minded country-townsman!"

"You surely don't expect depreciation on the score of your want of travel from one who nipped the grand American Crusade in the bud? I congratulate you on a course of conduct as admirable as that of the bravest traveller—keeping steadfastly to your post, and toiling honourably there."

"And growing into a dull dog there?"

"No, no; your work has not dulled or benumbed you. You have kept your heart warm with your love for your father and——"

"For you. Yes; without this love and my fanciful communions with you, and my thoughts (wild enough sometimes) of you and of our future, I should have sunk into a gloomy drudge. I must, however, acknowledge the comfort and help I have found in your father's company."

"And the satisfaction you have derived from the consciousness of having done your duty, we will add. As to my father, he will still be your friend, I am sure. And my mother's true, strong love for me will win her to our side ere long. But," said Clara, "I must cut short this happiness, and part from you now. Trust in God, George, and wait patiently."

"Impetuous and impatient as I am, I will wait patiently, for the prize will be great at the end. You can't comfort yourself with that thought so perfectly."

"I am content with the prize I shall

receive. You will endow me with your strong arm and your brave, kindly, loving heart, and with these I am content."

"I wish I could give you all you deserve."

"Such as a horse to ride on in harness of silver bells? Ah, you would like to play the part of Ivanhoe, and win the charger from the Templar with lance and sword."

George smiled sadly.

"My romances, like my travels, are confined to my dreams," he said. "The prosaic realities of life press so heavily upon me sometimes, that I feel as if I must make some desperate effort to burst my bonds, and take a taste of liberty."

"To roll on the ground before the world like a dog, for instance?" said Clara, with a quiet smile. "You have borne your yoke and burden well—most patiently—and vividly this flashed upon my mind to-day when

Storker was maintaining the necessity of recreation to such a trifler with work as himself. Act worthily and bravely still, till you have earned your independence, and, with a clear conscience, can summon me to join and follow you."

She rose, and with her hand still in Hern's, passed with him towards the border of the grove. They paused near a Spanish chestnut tree, through whose yellow blossoms a part of the roof of Mr. Swindell's house could be seen.

Above it rose roll upon roll of rather sombre cloud, like the smoke of a mighty battle; but, higher still in the vast realm of vapour, lay peaceful-looking masses of purest white, with here and there a slender streak of gold, like a cranny-gleam from a far-off land of light.

The gardener's wife had been heating the water for her own and her lodgers' tea; and

no altar fire could have sent forth a more calm and graceful breath than the little silver-blue column of smoke, which wavered upwards from the cottage chimney for a little way, and then spread itself and vanished. Clara pointed to it.

"It seems heart-broken," she exclaimed, "at the want of welcome from these other vapours so sublimely far above it!"

"Do you think it, then, an emblem of myself, and my pretensions, and their fate?" said George Hern, tightening his clasp upon her hand.

"I quite foresaw that reference," she said, with a cheery smile. "But we will not part with morbid thoughts in the ascendancy. I am prepared to go through life with you, and I see no horrifying visions in the future —no Juliet's drugs, no Cleopatra's asps. I will go through life with you: that is my portion—hand in hand, and heart to heart,

whatever shadows may confront you. Whatever burden you may have to bear I will share with you. I wish to act prudently, but will be no slave to prudence. I would follow you, if it were to a wilderness where never mortal step or voice has disturbed the whisperings of the desolate waters and the winds. I would not desert you, except at your own bidding, under threat of death. I can say no more. I will be loyal to the end. Good-night."

"Good-night!" said George Hern, earnestly. "My darling, knowing you, I can believe in angels well!"

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